

# HINDUISM

April/May/June, 2011 US\$7.95



Affirming Sanatana Dharma and Recording the Modern History of a Billion-Strong Global Religion in Renaissance



## Bharat Sevashram Sangh: Benevolent Band of Sadhus



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THOMAS KELLY

COVER: Bharat Sevashram Sangh monks in training pose with senior swamis in front of a statue of their founder, Acharya Pranavananda Maharaj (1896–1941); Nepalese women collect firewood in the Himalayas—a practice with an increasing environmental impact

APRIL/MAY/JUNE, 2011 • HINDU YEAR 5113  
KHARA, THE YEAR OF HARDSHIP

*Bodhinatha Veylanawami* [www.gurudeva.org](http://www.gurudeva.org)

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**Among Earth's last remaining rainforests, the Amazon jungle (left) is under siege. In Thomas Kelly's photo on the right, entire forests are set ablaze to clear the land, mostly for cattle raising. Such irreparable change is driven by economic desire, without thought of future generations.**

**Earth is changing dramatically. What is the Hindu view of the environment, and how can that perspective help humanity's current crisis? . . . page 36**





Aerostat, the largest helium balloon ever created, floats in space high inside the Commonwealth Games stadium, filled with incredible multimedia technology. Underneath, a human figure rises, sitting in the lotus posture. Don't miss the YouTube coverage!

DELHI

## Yoga Takes Center Stage!

ON OCTOBER 3, 2010, THE XIX COMMONWEALTH GAMES opened in New Delhi. Hindus were especially proud to have the ancient tradition of yoga represented as one of the longest of the dance presentations during the opening ceremonies at the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium. About 825 students from Swami Ramdev's Patanjali Yogapeeth performed coordinated postures. The seven-minute display of strength and flexibility by lithe, young yogis and yoginis was awesome. Vedic mantras played on the sound system as the group shifted formations depicting the seven chakras. The final scene was done in ice blue dark lighting with the yogis wearing lights on their heads, swirling to depict the serpent kundalini at the base of the spine. Then a human figure, formed by laser lights, sitting in lotus posture rose from below center stage, followed by the seven chakras rising up as if to depict the kundalini rising to the top of the head. The stadium was flooded with pride and joy as 130,000 cheered.

See: <http://bit.ly/19cwgames>

## GLOBAL DHARMA



She says she's a Hindu! But can she prove it?

INDIA

## Inter-Religious Marriages Not Binding?

A DIVORCE CASE BROUGHT by a Hindu man and a Christian woman who claimed to have converted to Hinduism resulted in a Delhi high court decision, December 30, 2010, that questions the validity of any Indian inter-religious

marriage. In India there are separate marriage laws for Hindus, Christians and Muslims which only apply to couples of the same faith. In this case, the judge, Justice Kailash Bambhir, said "a bare declaration that he is a Hindu by a person born in another faith is not sufficient to convert him to Hinduism" and that facts and/or documentation would be required to convince the court that conversion had taken place. On the issue of formal conversion see: [www.gurudeva.org/hbh](http://www.gurudeva.org/hbh)

AUSTRALIA

## Sanskrit Success Story

ON OCTOBER 30, 2010, THE Sydney Sanskrit School held a successful Samskrutotsavam (Sanskrit festival) with children putting on skits and plays, speaking only Sanskrit.

The school was started in 2006 by Dr. Meena Srinivasan, who holds a PhD in Sanskrit and has been teaching Sanskrit for over 25 years. It is a registered nonprofit organization recognized under the NSW Government Department of Education's Community Language Scheme. Three teachers teach thirty students in weekly two-hour classes. Some students won the Minister's Community Language awards in 2007.



Skanda Jagadeesh plays a swami coming to a village asking everyone to speak Sanskrit



CARIBBEAN

## Ma Ganga Goes to Trinidad

MA GANGA WORSHIP IS AS relevant today as it was thousands of years ago. Though She is located in Mother India, Her waters flow wherever She is worshipped. Ma Ganga is not just a physical river; She is a powerful presence which flows on the outside and also inside our own hearts. Ma Ganga's descent upon the earth to purify mankind is celebrated during the auspicious month of Kartik. The festival, known as Kartik Snan, was brought to Trinidad by East Indian immigrants more than one hundred and fifty years ago and continues to be celebrated annually.

In November 2010, I observed

the rites at the scenic fishing village of Cedros in the beautiful southwest peninsula of Trinidad and Tobago. Devotees gathered early in the morning under tents at the beach, prepared an altar and sang bhajans. Punditji performed *havan* and *puja*. Jhandis, or sacred flags, were erected to celebrate Her glory and the victory of positive over negative. Devotees made offerings to the water and then took a purifying snan, or bath, in the ocean. The atmosphere created by the humility and devotion of everyone gathered, from the very old to the very young, was truly uplifting and inspiring.

Report by Dr. P. Bahadursingh



Ma Ganga continues to be adored all over the world. After the worship of the river Ganga's descent in Trinidad, victory flags are planted

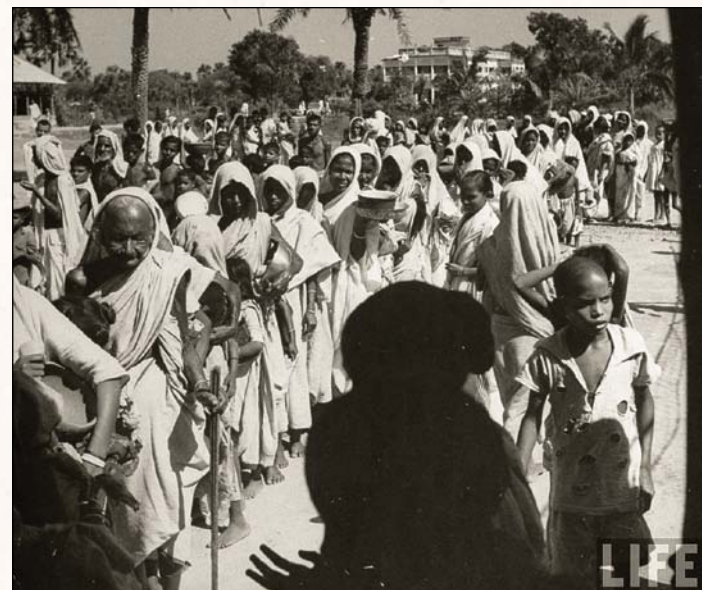
BOOKS

## How Churchill Starved India

THE NOVEMBER 2010 RELEASE of Madhusree Mukerjee's book, *Churchill's Secret War: The British Empire and the Ravaging of India During World War II*, has readers reeling. Between 1939 and 1945, the British used India's entire output of timber, woolen textiles and leather goods, as well as three quarters of its steel and cement, for defense. But few know the full story. To prevent Japanese invasion, the British confiscated

all forms of transport on the coast of Bengal. Economies were crashing. Without boats for trade, with rice prices beyond reach, Bengalis began to starve. The British hoarded rice not only for the war effort. They blocked even humanitarian wheat shipments from other countries. Mukerjee writes, "Churchill valued India so much, and hated Indian nationalists so much, that he wanted to starve them to death." Over three million died.

Below: A 1943 issue of Life features a story on starvation in Bengal



A Nepalese refugee family in Texas is building a new life

THE HINDU FRONT

## US Christians Target Hindu Refugees

HINDU TEMPLES, LEADERS and community organizers in the US should be alert to aggressive Christian missions working hard to convert recent Nepalese and Bhutanese refugees now residing in the US. Hindus need to take action and

reach out to these families.

The South Baptist Convention is one of the richest and most powerful evangelical Christian organizations in the world. Their North American Mission Board web site (<http://bit.ly/eUdb3L>) has an article detailing the history and opportunities for ministry among the Nepali and Bhutanese refugees who started to come to the US in 2008. The article focuses on the work of Rev. Samuel Cho, senior pastor of both The Nepal Baptist Church of Baltimore and The Bhutan Baptist Church, which he established with the help of converted refugees. Rev. Cho works in the Baltimore area as well as on foreign missions.

He planted his first Korean Church in Baltimore in 1999. At the time, he and his wife Young frequented a Korean restaurant where they met a Nepali waitress, Nina Shrestha, and her husband. The Chos became friends with the Hindu couple and eventually converted them. The friendship was pivotal, as it sparked an interest for Cho in the Nepali people. A primary tool for conversion is the offering of medical fairs, which provide not only free medical services, but also Bibles and "the message."





## By Water Instead of by Fire

BURIAL AFTER DEATH TAKES UP precious land and requires plot maintenance. More and more people are opting for cremation. In Japan, the cremation rate is 99.85 percent. The US rate rose to about 35 percent in 2010. In India most corpses are cremated, but lacking sufficient fuel, the burning is often partial, leaving unburned remains that are a serious pollution issue.

Cremation saves land but has its own drawbacks, starting with high fuel or energy consumption. Zoning laws may prevent release of smoke in densely populated areas. European laws require costly filtering of gases to remove toxic metal vapor from teeth fillings.

Now, bodies can be disposed by an even greener method—resomation, a process invented by

Scotsman Sandy Sullivan. Think of it as dissolution by water.

The corpse is immersed in 100 gallons of water mixed with potassium hydroxide, which is raised to a temperature of 180° C (350° F). In three hours the body is dissolved into basic elements, leaving only soft bones and a brown fluid. Not one iota of DNA remains.

The resomation liquid is simply drained into the public sewage system, which some considering this option may find undignified. Advocates point out that the course of the remains is not so different in cremation. They go up into the atmosphere, returning to the earth during rains. In both processes, the remains return to the earth. In both processes only the powdered bones are given to



Sandy Sullivan, (left) inventor of the resomation chamber, with his engineering manager Craig Sinclair. Sandy claims, "This process is a true paradigm shift—a game changer—in body disposition."

relatives as ashes.

Resomation has a much lower carbon footprint (CO<sub>2</sub>) than cremation, requires seven times less energy, and no metals are incinerated. Resomation fluid is relatively benign, but is highly alkaline (pH 10.5–11.5). It has not presented any problems for waste treatment facilities. Pragmatists point out that it may be a

good fertilizer element; plus resomation provides the option of recycling jewelry and prosthetic limbs, which are destroyed by cremation. While many Hindus may be more at home with cremation, resomation may meet the traditional requirement of bodily disposition within 24 hours of death.

See: [www.resomation.com](http://www.resomation.com)

activists allege that the patent is the latest act of biopiracy—whereby Western corporations plunder and attempt to own techniques, plants or genes that have been used in emerging world for centuries. Colgate's formulation claims novel elements such as the abrasive material but arrogates India's traditional botanicals.

The Association of Manufacturers of Ayurvedic Medicines, an Indian body that promotes traditional remedies, is demanding that the Indian government take legal action against Colgate. Devender Triguna, Association president, challenges, "This toothpowder's ingredients have

been used by the common Indian man for thousands of years. So how can it be patented?"

The dispute is likely to become a test case for who owns India's folk medicines—a repository potentially worth billions. India is one of 17 nations to form the Group of Like-Minded Megadiverse Countries, an alliance that has accused richer countries of tapping the emerging world's resources for medicines and cosmetics without paying royalties. India is in the process of creating 34 million web pages to document its ancient medicinal techniques in order to block claims by foreign profiteers.

See: US Patent 7736629

taken steps to harness solar power to run spinning wheels, reducing hand labor and producing a more uniform yard at a faster rate. The technology will produce 100% green khadi silk, cotton or wool.

**HUNDREDS OF PAKISTANI HINDU** families in the Balochistan area are trying to migrate to India in the wake of deteriorating local law and order. Meanwhile in

India, more than 400 Pakistani refugees are still awaiting citizenship, some for over 18 years.

**ON JANUARY 4, 2011, A FEDERAL** appeals court ruled that the 43-foot cross on California's Mount Soledad is unconstitutional. The decision reverses a lower court but does not determine what will happen to the cross, since it is a prominent feature that was erected in 1913.

PHOTOS: RESOMATION LTD.; COLGATE



## IN MY OPINION

# The Sacred Act of Eating

## A Hindu foodie reflects on the endangered daily ritual of food preparation and enjoyment

BY DEEPA IYER

IN MY GREAT GRANDMOTHER'S house in Thanjavur, every meal represented an elaborate ritual. She washed a fresh set of clothes every night, rose daily at 4 am, while the rest of the house still slumbered, and took a bath before cooking. Prior to touching any ingredients, she prayed before a faded wall covered with frame after frame of Hindu iconography. Only then would she start to prepare the meal.

When we sat down to eat, on the floor across from the prayer wall, the meal itself was systematic. First, someone laid plantain leaves on the cleaned floor. Then, the men recited Sanskrit prayers, pouring a little water into their right palms and circling their leaves with it to signify cleansing the mind and heart before approaching the food. Somebody took a little food and left it outside for the crows, to return part of the food to nature. Normally I was designated as the crow feeder.

After all this, the meal would commence with a clatter of sounds, colors, textures and tastes. We ate deftly, using our right hands to gracefully sweep food across the plantain leaf and lift it to our mouths. When the last morsel disappeared, several family members would say an old Sanskrit adage meaning "May the ones providing this food be happy and healthy." The customs and the food contributed to a celebration of community and utter deliciousness.

Today I try to think of my food in this context. I love how truly delicious food can engage all five senses at once. Ripe, bright vegetables, their lush skins just begging to be chopped. The smell of spices—cumin, turmeric, saffron, coriander, mint—dancing lightly across the air. The inquisitive tang of my grandmother's freshly churned butter. Crispy, warm *pain au chocolat*, or the sweet, slightly acidic tenor of fresh mango sorbet.

Hindu culture has an extensive culinary theology that ascribes ritual and mystical importance to food. Food is a manifesta-



tion of Brahman, the supreme energy motivating the universe. "Food is God," my mother would tell me, as I pushed curry moodily around my plate as a child. At the time, I couldn't relate; eating quickly was a ticket to getting outside. Although I didn't revel in food, I always loved the rituals. They made meals more interesting for a child who would rather be playing with friends

on the block.

Hindu scriptures point to three forces that influence food's nutrition: *pathra shuddhi*, the cleanliness of the cooking vessels; *paka shuddhi*, the chef's cleanliness and mental attitude; and *pachaka shuddhi*, the quality of ingredients. Because "you are what you eat," Hindus believe that these three *shuddhis*, or purities, directly transfer to the eater.

The practical message? Eat like it's your last meal, and be thoroughly aware of every bite. In Hindu culture, eating is a ritual: a sacrifice to the Supreme, unified by the recognition that process (cooking), object (food), and individual are all inextricably connected.

That's why, for me, eating is not just about sating a hungry stomach. It's about taking the time to prepare a varied meal and presenting it in an aesthetically pleasing way. I always eat sitting down, and try to eat unhurriedly, really tasting each bite. It's a way to ground myself in the evenings after work, a near-meditative experience.

I've noticed that we tend to collectively push the seemingly mundane tasks that are critical to survival, like eating, into the background. For many, food is a steady, often mechanized habit. Yet, it has a depth that cannot be ignored. The next time you see something yummy, turn it into your own ritual: sit down, dig in, and enjoy every bite.

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## PATENT WARS

# Stealing India's Herbal Lore

IN JUNE OF 2010, US GIANT manufacturer of household goods, Colgate, was granted a US patent for what it claims is a groundbreaking "red herbal dentifrice." Colgate is the world's largest toothpaste producer and is looking to step

into India's multibillion-dollar Indian oral hygiene market.

The problem is that the ingredients—including clove oil, camphor, black pepper and spearmint—date back to antiquity on the subcontinent.

India's increasingly vocal

## BRIEFLY...

### MORE YOUTH GIVE UP MEAT.

In a 2010 online Harris Interactive poll commissioned by the Vegetarian Resource Group (VRG) of 1,258 US youth ages 8 to 18, three percent said they have never eaten meat, poultry or fish/

seafood. VRG writes: "We would estimate about 1.4 million youth in the United States are vegetarian, while about three million never eat meat."

**THE MAHATMA GANDHI INSTITUTE** of Rural Industrialization has





# When Kids Embrace Hinduism

For best results in passing on your faith, present concepts as life-enhancing tools rather than life-restricting rules

BY SATGURU BODHINATHA VEYLANSWAMI

**A**LL TOO OFTEN, HINDU CONCEPTS AND PRACTICES are explained to children and youth as rules rather than as tools. Rules restrict what we can do in life and have the sense of making things less enjoyable. Kids, especially, rebel at too many rules. Tools, on the other hand, make them more effective and improve their quality of life. We can transform cumbersome rules into appealing tools by clearly explaining the processes involved in a practice or custom and the benefits it has to offer. The object is to catch the child's interest, to show how Hinduism will help her make spiritual progress and enjoy a happier and more successful life. It is inspiration, not rules, that drive people forward, and children are no different in this regard.



Imagine a teenager challenging her parents about three family practices: "Why are we vegetarian?" "Why do we need to go to the temple every week?" "Why can't I listen to hip hop music like my friends do?" Unfortunately, parents may not take the time to give thoughtful, complete answers to such questions, and instead take the easy route, decreeing, "It's what our family has always done." Because many of their friends don't have to follow such a strict code of conduct, youth hearing this answer can easily conclude that Hinduism is a just a set of rules that makes life restrictive and unhappy.

Before answering these questions in a way that transforms them from rules into tools, let's review some basic concepts. These are what I call "big ideas."

## Two Big Ideas

The first big idea is that everything affects our consciousness. My guru's guru, Yogaswami of Sri Lanka, explained: "What you think, that you become. If you think God, you become God. If you think food, you become food. Everything influences consciousness."

The second big idea is that each of us is a soul, a divine being living in a physical body, and we have a three-fold nature. At the deepest level, we are a pure, radiant, blissful soul. That is our spiritual or intuitive nature. We also have an intellectual nature and an instinctive nature. So, we have three aspects: spiritual (knowing, being), intellectual (thinking) and instinctive (feeling). The instinctive nature consists of our lower, animal instincts, such as self-preservation, procreation, hunger and thirst. It also includes the emotions of greed, hatred, anger, fear, lust and jealousy. This is our desire/feeling nature. The intellectual nature is our faculty of reason and logical thinking. It is the source of discriminating thought. The intuitive nature is the mind of light, of omniscient knowing, omnipresent awareness, pure consciousness, truth and love. This is our spiritual nature.

Using this pair of big ideas, we are now ready to answer the three questions.

## Why Are We Vegetarian?

In India, vegetarianism is well established, and not eating meat is seldom a target for criticism. In other countries, however, being a vegetarian is the exception, and vegetarian children are often the brunt of ridicule, peer pressure and chiding. Adding injury to insult, in most school cafeterias and at social events, veggie options are meager, unimaginative and unhealthy. There is practically nothing a vegetarian student can eat!

Little wonder that children want to take the easy way out and abandon a vegetarian diet. However, there are

compelling reasons for being a vegetarian. The main one is that eating meat affects their consciousness in a negative way, bringing them into the instinctive nature.

Explain to children that if they want to live in higher consciousness, in their soul nature, in peace and happiness and love for all creatures, they cannot eat meat, fish, shellfish, fowl or eggs. The reason for this is that by ingesting the grosser chemistries of animal foods, one introduces into the body and mind anger, jealousy, fear, anxiety, suspicion and the terrible fear of death, all of which is locked, biochemically, into the flesh of butchered creatures.

In other words, meat eating will strengthen their instinctive nature and make them more prone to these lower emotions. By eating meat, they will become angry more often and experience darker moods. My guru stated, "Vegetarianism is very important. In my fifty years of ministry, it has become quite evident that vegetarian families have far fewer problems than those who are not vegetarian." Children who are awakening to this understanding all over the world are becoming vegetarians all on their own. And these days, with a GPS-enabled iPad, a little research and creativity, vegetarian options can be discovered just about anywhere.

## Why Must We Go to the Temple Every Week?

Explain to children that worshiping in the temple is one of the traditional ways Hinduism gives us for connecting with our soul nature and experiencing ananda, the natural bliss of the soul. They can visit the temple in state of discontent, receive the blessings of God and the Gods and go away uplifted and happy. How is this possible? The Deity's blessings have cleared their mind and aura of



**Conveying Hinduism to children:** A father and daughter pour water over a Sivalingam together. Through personal experience, youth embrace their religion as their own, finding that it strengthens and enhances their life.

to join the family will change. The temple will become important to them, not just to mom and dad. Temple worship will help them remain calm and centered even in difficult circumstances. They will find that going in the right spirit is a way of pulling themselves back together. It is also a place for assuaging long-held hurts.

Teach children to go to the temple and place their problems at the feet of the Deity, to bring offerings and talk to the Deity about their unhappiness, just as if they were talking to a friend in this physical world. There, with the Deity, they will go through a deep, inner process and receive blessings from the Deity if they open themselves in the right way. They may find that when they leave the temple they can't remember what the problem was. That's a sign of success.

Of course, the benefits of attending a temple every week are not limited to times that they are emotionally upset. Even when everything is going well in their life, worshipping at the temple with sincerity and attentiveness takes them deeper into their soul nature. They will be more compassionate and understanding, better able to deal with the challenges that come to them in life. Once your child realizes that worship is a powerful Hindu tool, and not just another adult rule, she will ask you to take her to the temple every week.

## Why Can't I Listen to Hip-Hop Music?

Music, especially when listened to for extended periods, strongly influences our state of consciousness. Whatever children listen to brings them into one state of consciousness or another. My guru, Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, was outspoken on this topic. He felt that the type of music played in the home and the message it delivers are crucial. He stated that great care should be exercised to exclude the crass music and lyrics of lower consciousness. "The drug culture and its demonic music erode the very fabric of human character and culture." If your child catches this idea, her musical preferences will evolve—not because of rules you impose, but because she understands how different kinds of music influence her mood and mind. At the very least, she will avoid crude, negative hip-hop and listen only to the genre's higher strains. Ideally, the music played in the home should be beautiful Hindu music played on traditional instruments which takes everyone in the family into their refined and cultured soul nature.

## Remember that Tools Out-Perform Rules!

Taking time to give sensible answers to your child's questions about every Hindu practice is definitely worthwhile. Include in your explanation how the practice or restriction influences her consciousness. This will greatly increase the chances of her enthusiastically following the practice. And in some instances, your child will become inspired to urge other Hindu youth to give it a try as well!





## LETTERS

### Thank You, Hinduism Today

Thank you for the excellent service rendered to our faith. The articles "Guru Purnima: Honoring the Illumined Teachers" (Apr/May/ Jun 2010), "A Little Fortright Talk Down Under" (Jul/Aug/Sep 2010) and "Letting Go of Past and Future" (Jul/Aug/Sep 2010) were thoroughly enjoyable, informative and life influencing.

DEEPTI R. PAIKRAY  
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I want to thank the monks who do such beautiful work publishing HINDUISM TODAY. As a teacher of English at the University of Montpellier, in southern France, I use HINDUISM TODAY regularly as a text from which to study the modern American idiom, among other magazines such as *Time*, *National Review* and *US News*. Many students with a spiritual inclination ask me to read from HINDUISM TODAY. Thus, at the same time they improve their English, they are learning of the marvelous depths of the Hindu religion.

ALAIN-FRANÇOIS REVON  
MONTPELLIER, FRANCE

It was a pleasant surprise to come across your magazine on the web while searching for any regularly published magazines on Hinduism and its multi-dimensional facets. Strangely, I have not come across such a comprehensive magazine on the subject published in India, and I'm not sure whether one exists. The article "Letting Go of Past and Future" (Jul/Aug/Sep 2010) was very appropriate, and the technique of enjoying the present with a holistic view makes greater sense after imagining oneself perched on top of a tree. I hope to see more insights on yogic techniques in the future.

ROHIT KUMAR  
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HINDUISM TODAY comes up with new themes in each issue about Hindus all over the world. Even the "Global Dharma" section has informative news from across the globe. For a vegetarian, knowing about the silver foil in food (Jul/Aug/Sep 2010) was an eye-opener about food contamination. Thank you for your efforts.

SRI MALLAMPALLI  
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I am from Australia and now live in Canada. My mother was born in Madras, India, and my father was born in Malaysia of Indian parents. I am currently teaching a Grade 11

World Religions class in an all-girls Catholic high school. I have been blessed to have stumbled across your website. I just watched your YouTube video related to Chapter 3 of *What Is Hinduism?*, "God, Soul and World." Your organization sounds so professional, filled with accurate knowledge, insight, a variety of sources and engaging visuals to reinforce the information you present about Hinduism. Thank you for your efforts in spreading the truth with accuracy, knowledge, wisdom and hard work.

AVA FERNANDEZ  
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I do not find apt words to describe my feelings of joy at the content of the Jan/Feb/Mar 2010 issue, the way it was presented and, of course, the production overall. To be frank, I never thought that there could be a such a wonderful magazine from foreign soil on Hinduism and its rich heritage. My heartfelt congratulations to the entire team for the hard work you put in and your involvement and devotion. I pray at the feet of the Almighty to bless all of you there with all necessary strength and long life to carry on this holy work further.

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### Conversion in Malaysia

I refer to Mr. Thuruvan's letter on conversion (Apr/May/Jun 2010). I was told by a reliable source that the figure is much higher. It's not only Hindus but also Muslims falling into this trap. Conversion here is done in a very peacockish manner. The preachers approach you any which way. My mother experienced this, but she told them to get lost. They talked to me about healing and read some verses from the Bible. I told them boldly, "I was born as a Hindu, live as a Hindu and will die as a Hindu. I respect every religion, but does that mean I must convert to them? No." My explanation left the preachers speechless and they just walked away. That's what every Hindu should do. Every Hindu must proud of their religion and have a solid understanding of it. Hinduism is a liberal and diverse religion, with many ways to reach God. The younger generation are confused and lost because their parents have little knowledge to pass on to them.

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I am very concerned about this, too. The Christian evangelists are coming by the van loads, descending on all the housing estates.

They persistently stand at the gate and force their religious pamphlets on the Hindu residents. They have no regard or respect for Hinduism. My husband and I have been teaching Hinduism for ten years now to children 6 to 17 years of age. In our experience we have discovered that children rapidly absorb the teachings. Many things can be done to educate Hindus: volunteers should start teaching the basics of Hinduism to children in temples; temple committees should create the space for teaching and invite religious teachers to talk to devotees at least once a week on the fundamentals of Hinduism; the Malaysia Hindu Sangam should provide training for school teachers in religion (many teachers would like to do this). With almost 90% of teachers and students in Tamil schools being Hindu, I am sure school heads could provide a session for teaching religion once a week before school starts.

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### Marriages Illegitimate in India?

Refer to "Hindu-non-Hindu Marriages Not Legally Binding in India" (Hindu Press International, Dec 30, 2010, and page 6 here). Does that mean the court has made all children from inter-faith marriages illegitimate? I'm not surprised at the court's opinion. I see some xenophobia and exclusivity in it. I also see this at temples sometimes. I see it in Indian movies—Anglo-Indian movies, too (think "Bride and Prejudice"). Not that everyone who is Hindu agrees with this court opinion. I consider myself Hindu—I have for the past ten years at least—and I don't agree with it. Other than Indonesia ruling the same thing, I've never heard of any clergy or nation declaring marriages invalid if the couple aren't of the same faith. It seems like it negates the power of the clergy of all faiths in India. Is their ability to marry given power and made legitimate only if it's among members of their faith? Where does this put civil marriages?

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### Development in Vrindavan

Today, India is undergoing a tremendous development revolution. The middle class is booming, and many sectors of the population, especially in the cities, are basking in a newfound wealth. This is fuelling a spirit of conspicuous consumption and the conviction that consumerism is the only way to economic development. This means more cars, bigger highways and febrile drivers all looking for somewhere



to go. Tourism is regarded as a new magic formula for combating poverty. And Vrindavan, Radha and Krishna's playground, is a Disney World just waiting to be built!

Environmentalists first saw this coming decades ago, but calls for sane planning—that would have preserved green spaces, the Yamuna flood plains and the ancient ashrams—were ignored. In 2009 came a shock: UP Chief Minister Sushri Mayawati proclaimed her "dream project" to develop Vrindavan; she ordered the Parikrama Marg widened and "beautified." Cash began flowing; ancient trees were chopped down by the hundreds. The crowning desecration was the construction of a bypass over the sacred Yamuna, directly in front of the picturesque Keshi Ghat. The monstrous structure would turn the holy path into a ring road for funneling vehicle traffic in and out of Vrindavan. Tourists could now take drive-thought darshan at the major temples and be back in Delhi by night. Bathers in the Yamuna would take darshan of concrete pillars and traffic.

Lovers of Vrindavan despaired: was Vrindavan to be turned into an urban jungle like Delhi or Mumbai? Was it destined to become a museum of petrified religiosity for tourists to gawk at? Fortunately, construction of the bypass was stopped by the Archeological Survey of India; but the spirit of uncontrolled development continues unabated.

The vocation of Vrindavan continues to be

under attack. It is time India thinks carefully how to develop its holy places in a sustainable way. They are meant to be reserves for the spiritually minded. They need protection from the destructive steamroller of crude materialism. Time is short. The voices of India's holy men and women, indeed of all Hindus of vision, must make themselves heard before it is too late.

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### Salvific Exclusivity

Three Abrahamic faiths, Christianity, Islam and Judaism, carry the exclusivist monotheistic belief that there is only one way to the heaven and that it is theirs. Here, a proud Hindu, Pooja, and honest McKenna had open discussion based on what they have learned from their families and religious institutions ("Debating the Merits of Our Two Religions," Oct/Nov/Dec 2010). Unfortunately, youths in college do not openly express their personal feelings from the fear of being labeled as intolerant.

My research shows that 38% of Hindus, Sikhs and Jains (Dharmics) marry to Abrahams in America. Many times an exclusivist Abrahamic cannot tolerate a Dharmic in married life, and they expect religious conversion before marriage or ask for the promise to raise their children in his or her faith only. After years of being in a romantic

relationship, reluctantly accepting the religious conversion may be the only way left for a Dharmic to avert marital grid-lock. All young adults in relationships with Abrahams should proactively find out whether their intended spouse is truly tolerant.

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### Corrections

✓ *Julia Roberts's name was misspelled "Julie" in "Global Dharma: I Am a Hindu" (Jan/Feb/Mar, 2011).*

✓ *In "Thai Pusam: Honoring the God of Yoga" (Apr/May/Jun 2010), we incorrectly stated that, at Batu Caves, the utsava murti is carried to the Murugan shrine inside the cave. It is placed in a separate hall in the caves, remaining there for three days of special pujas before returning to the Sri Mahamariamman Temple.*

Letters with writer's name, address and daytime phone number should be sent to:

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Letters may be edited for space and clarity and may appear in electronic versions of HINDUISM TODAY.

## Dispensing Scriptures' Gold

### How to help light find its way to peoples' hearts

I HAD THE GOOD FORTUNE TO GROW up surrounded by holy books and by people who loved them," Mr. Asan Tejwani recalls of his early life in Sindh. His fondness for scripture has remained with him and given him a passion for *gyan daan*, the giving of holy books and sharing of words of wisdom.

Asan moved to the USA in 1964, worked in structural engineering, then in financial services, and is retired today. When he is not traveling (which he does a great deal of), he participates in charitable activities, maintains an e-mail list to whom he sends daily inspired messages and—as ever—gives away lots and lots of books.

"I have given thousands of them to libraries and individuals," he explains, "including hundreds of books by Gurudeva (founder of HINDUISM TODAY), and thousands of HINDUISM TODAY's history lessons. It is my constant and blessed sacrifice. You never know when a holy word

will find its way to someone's heart."

In HINDUISM TODAY Asan has found a fellow dispenser of teachings. "The magazine has picked up the spirit of Swami Vivekananda, articulating the Hindu renaissance in a way that welcomes, includes and uplifts everyone, showing the divine essence of us all. It is inclusivist, not exclusivist. This is gold."

Mr. Tejwani has given generously to the Hinduism Today Production Fund, which is a part of Hindu Heritage Endowment. Recently, he has also made it a beneficiary in his estate plan. "I want to do all I can to help the magazine reach as many people as possible. It is our generation's duty to fortify this fund so the magazine stays strong for 1,000 years, no matter what the world goes through. Each of us can give one dollar a day and be a *give-365*. Let's do it!"

If, like Mr. Tejwani, you are enthusiastic to help HINDUISM TODAY dispense the gold it contains, please consider donating to the Hinduism Today Production Fund



**Asan Tejwani at Angkor Wat.** "I love to travel and discover new forms of culture and ways of life that souls migrate through on the way to their destiny. I see myself reflected everywhere."

or including in your estate plan. Read about the fund at [www.hheonline.org/productionfund](http://www.hheonline.org/productionfund).

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## QUOTES & QUIPS

True beauty consists in purity of heart.

**Mahatma Gandhi** (1869–1948)

To drink pure water from a shallow pond, one should gently take the water from the surface without disturbing the mud at the bottom. If you desire to be pure, have firm faith and slowly go on with your devotional practices without wasting your energy in useless scriptural discussions and arguments. Keep your mind like clear water, for God is above all arguments. **Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa** (1836–1886)

Look at your mind dispassionately; this is enough to calm it. Only when it is quiet can you go beyond it. Do not keep the mind busy all the time, stop it and just be. If you give it a rest, it will settle down and recover its purity and strength. **Nisargadatta Maharaj** (1897–1981), *Hindu sage*

Transformation is more important than information. **Sri Sakthi Amma**, head of the Narayani Peedam of Malaikodi, Tamil Nadu, India

God defined is God denied. To define is to limit. Yet, the deepest of my consciousness calls on Him as pure love. **Sadhu Vaswani**, (1879–1966) founder of Sadhu Vaswani Mission

The caste system is opposed to the religion described in Vedanta. Caste is a social custom, and all our great preachers have tried to break it down. Every sect has preached against caste, and every time it has only riveted the chains. Caste is simply the outgrowth of the political

institutions of India; it is a hereditary trade guild. Interaction with the West has broken caste more than any teaching. **Swami Vivekananda** (1863–1902)

When the facts change, I change my mind. What do you do, sir? **John Maynard Keynes** (1883–1946), *British economist*

Well, it's a pleasure to meet you. Now, tell me, are you a Sunni or a Shia Hindu? *An American congressman upon being introduced to the directors of the Hindu American Foundation in 2004. HAF frequently uses this story to illustrate the importance of their work.*

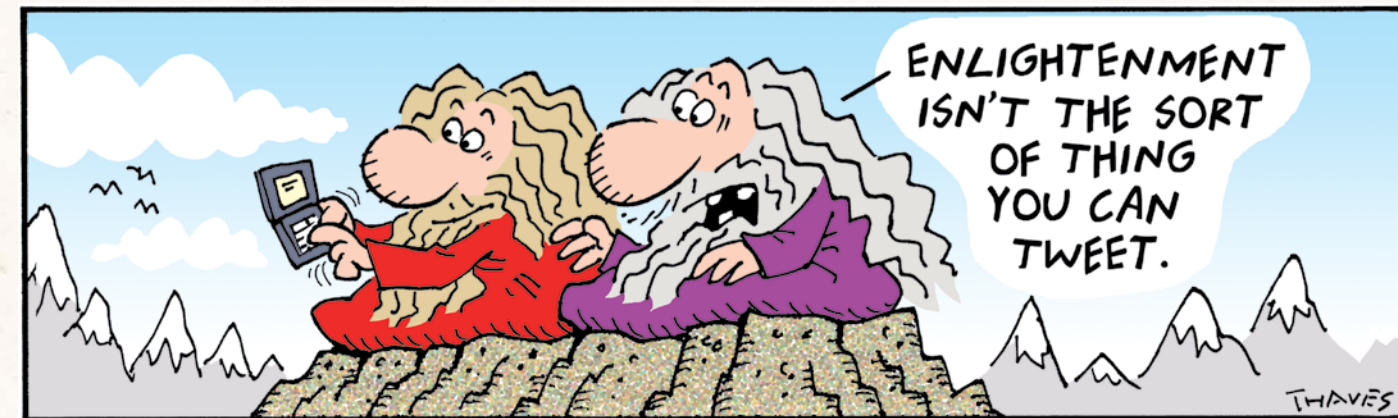
We can do whatever we want to the

and be visible even during the day. After that, Ardra will be a small neutron star, unimaginably dense, spinning incredibly fast. Just a cup of matter from a neutron star's core weighs more than all the mountains of the Himalayas combined.



## Frank and Ernest

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environment and no harm will come, because the *Bible* says God won't allow the earth to be destroyed. **John Shimkus**, *Republican congressman from Illinois, member of the Energy and Commerce Committee*

Why do people who know the least know it the loudest?

When we were young kids growing up in America, we were told to always finish dinner. Our mothers said, 'Think of the starving children in India.' But now I tell my children: 'Finish your homework. Think of the children in India who will make you starve if you don't.' **Thomas Friedman**, *columnist for The New York Times*

Being upset reflects the lack of a strategy. **Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami**, publisher of HINDUISM TODAY

Worry is like a rocking chair. It keeps the mind occupied, but doesn't get you very far.

We are all bubbles in the ocean. The bubble is in the ocean; the ocean is in the bubble. **Satguru Siva Yogaswami**, (1872–1964) *Sri Lankan mystic*

Silence is not the absence of communication. It is saying everything without words.

Offer oblations in love, light golden lamps. Spread incense of fragrant wood and lighted camphor in all directions. Forget your

worldly worries and meditate. Worshipping thus, there is nothing that you cannot attain. Worshipping thus, you shall inherit the wealth of Indra, heaven's king. Worshipping thus, you shall gain miraculous powers. Worshipping thus, you shall attain moksha. **Tirumantiram**, verses 1005–1006

Faith is the bird that feels the light and sings when the dawn is still dark. **Rabindranath Tagore** (1861–1941), *Indian poet*

Siva's devotees know a society is only as free as the freedom enjoyed by its minorities. **Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami** (1927–2001), founder of HINDUISM TODAY

## DID YOU KNOW?

### Ardra, the Dancing Star

**A**RDRA IS THE STAR THAT NAMES ONE of the *nakshatras*, the 27 lunar mansions of Hindu astrology. It is known as Siva's star, a cosmic representation of His third eye, red and intense.

Called Betelgeuse in the West (a medieval Arabic name), it fascinates and consternates modern astronomers. Though it is one of the most studied of suns, it defies description, as it changes in brightness, size and even shape with rhythmic gusto.

Scientists call Ardra "mysterious" and "elusive" in their published works, informally calling this massive orb "the dancing star." Hindus might find the name apt—after all, Siva is Nataraja, King of Dance.

Ardra is part of the constellation of Orion, shining as the brightest red star in the sky. Because of its blazing choreography, there is no certainty about how far it is from Earth, but the latest calculations point to around

600 light-years. Siva's star is colossal. For sake of comparison, if it were the size of a football stadium, Earth would be a spec of dust, and the Sun no larger than a mango.

Ardra is nearing a transitional point in its evolution. Tomorrow, perhaps, or several thousand years from now—it will enter a supernova stage. In that act, marking the height of this cosmic performance, Ardra will convert most of itself into light and cosmic rays, sending its energy out to the universe in a blinding flash. When that happens, it will outshine the full moon in our sky for months

## BASICS OF HINDUISM

### The Esoterics of Hindu Worship

**R**ING THE BELL, LIGHT THE ARATI, chant the mantra and there He is—a God subtly manifest, a Lord of the Cosmos heeding your call. The mystical nature of worship is a mighty aspect of Hinduism, though simple in its mechanism. By humble *aratis* or through the soaring complexity of week-long rituals, the result is always a connection between worlds. Veils lift, doors open: God comes to us.

Hindus do not worship stone images. Those who say such things do not understand the inner workings of the temple. When invoked, the Deities arrive in their subtle bodies of light. They hover in and above the stone image and bless devotees,

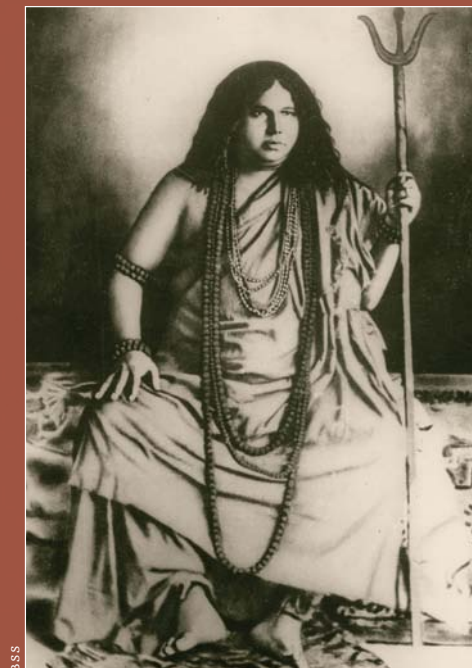
cleansing auras and easing karmas. If your third eye is open, you can see the God or Goddess and enjoy personal *darshan*. Many of our ancient saints, as well as contemporary devotees, have had such visions. You may not be able to see these subtle beings, but you can feel their presence as a rarified holy atmosphere. After such an experience, we leave with our mind filled and thrilled with its shakti in every nerve current of our body. A sanctified Hindu temple is filled with hosts of devas. When we return home, lighting an oil lamp brings along the power of the temple. This simple action gives the devas a focal point, inviting them into the home shrine to bless and protect the family.











(Left) Swami Shivarupanandaji poses with some of the 500 resident tribal students at the Jamshedpur Ashram temple in Jharkhand State, India, about 300 km west of Kolkata; (above) Sangh founder Jagat Guru Acharya Srimat Swami Pranavanandaji Maharaj, 1896–1941; (below) the BSS logo



## INDIA: AT HER SERVICE

# Bharat Sevashram Sangha

### SPECIAL FEATURE

## The Team: 500 Monks. The Mission: Empower Hindu Society

**T**HE BHARAT SEVASHRAM SANGHA IS A SPIRITUAL brotherhood of Hindu monks and volunteer workers founded in 1917 by Acharya Srimat Swami Pranavananda Maharaj. Today it comprises over 100 ashrams, 450 local religious centers called “Milan Mandirs” and hundreds of service and educational

projects, all under the direction of 500 BSS monks. It is one of the India’s largest modern-day monastic orders, on the scale of the Ramakrishna Mission and BAPS Swaminarayan. The organization flourished even in the darkest days of the British era, feeding the starving, educating the ignorant and uplifting the Hindu masses.





Our report first covers the life of Acharya Pranavananda Maharaj, the founding of the Sangha, its monastic order and organizational components. Then our correspondent shares his week-long tour of the BSS headquarters in Kolkata and a few of their projects in the states of West Bengal and Jharkhand, in Eastern India.

BY RAJIV MALIK, DELHI

**A**CHARYA PRANAVANANDA MAHARAJ was born in 1896 on the auspicious full-moon day in the month of Maghi (February 28) in Bajitpur, in what is now Bangladesh. The boot of British colonialism rested firmly on India's neck and the masses were being mobilized to foment independence. That same year Gandhi moved to South Africa to begin the fight for the rights of Indians and only three years had passed since Swami Vivekananda's triumphant appearance at the World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893. The boy's birth would later be interpreted as fulfilling India's desperate call for great leaders.

Nicknamed Vinode, "source of joy," by his parents, the child grew into a strapping youth, fully six-foot, six-inches tall and renowned for his physical strength. His preferred exercise was swinging two clubs, weighing one *maund* (37 kilos) each, for hundreds of repetitions at a time (a total of 5,000 a day), before settling back into meditation. He rejected his family's fish-eating diet and, despite their pleadings, became a vegetarian living mostly on milk and potatoes. That sounds severe, but the US Department of Agriculture claims, "such a diet would supply



almost all of the food elements necessary for the maintenance of the human body."

Early on, his ability to organize his fellow youth to help the poor attracted the attention of British authorities, who had to be convinced by the school that he was just a gentle 11-year-old doing nothing wrong. At 17 years of age, he sought out Baba Gambhiranathji a great yogi of the Natha Sampradaya, and underwent five years of intense sadhana and tapas. Finally, in 1916, he had a tremendous vision of his life's mission and vowed to someday establish the Bharat Sevashram Sangha. So insistent was his talk of liberating the country from the British, the police surveilled his activities and he spent a brief stint in jail.

In January 1924, at age 28, he was initiated into sannyas, Hindu monasticism, by Swami Govindananandagiri and received the name Acharya Swami Pranavanandaji Maharaj. A month later, a group of his young followers also took sannyas. As part of the Dasanami orders of Adi Shankara, they formed the core group of the BSS. The monks are Saivites, though Acharya did not favor making such distinctions among Hindus.

Over time, Acharya set up a 12- to 14-year monastic training program. Aspirants to monastic life spend their first two years as a volunteer worker under the close guidance of a senior monk. Those who qualify are given the sacred thread ceremony, and undergo further training to prepare them for initiation as a sannyasin. The monks, strict about celibacy, strive to always do their work in groups. They are pure vegetarians who do not take onion, garlic, coffee or tea. Oc-

asionally an aspirant will leave the ashram and marry. Swami Biswatmananda, BSS chief coordinator, said, "All such sannyas aspirants who choose a householder's life later come and repent their decision. But they cannot be accepted back."

Swami Parameshananda of the New York BSS center explained their training program. "Based on his *svadharma* [personal innate tendencies and inclinations], he is assigned responsibilities whereby he grows and matures naturally. It is for this reason the Sangha is a complete body. Some monks become great speakers and some great cooks, etc., all without sacrificing their spiritual life. Acharya, as their guru, guides the Sangha from behind the curtain."

Acharya Pranavananda set lofty goals for his eager band. He felt that sannyasins, and perhaps only sannyasins, could save Hindu dharma. "The Hindus are not so much in need of ideas and ideals," he declared, "as they are in need of strength, unity, organization, power of self-defense and a will for self-expansion. Ideas and ideals they have enough; they have enough of plans and programs. But everything has become meaningless for want of strength and energy. The entire Hindu population is to be vitalized by an infusion of tremendous energy."

Acharya wrote to one of his monks: "Man possesses unlimited strength, infinite capacity for work and boundless perseverance. It is because they cannot always realize that, most of them are so miserably inert. Since it is necessary to set before the country a new ideal of 'sannyasi,' a number of monks like you have to shed every drop of blood

to purge the highly corrupt state prevailing in the country, by forgetting all thoughts of personal ease and comforts in the supreme cause of the Great Liberation of the world. You are to stimulate a good deal of activity among the monks of India now lying idle if the stigma that is now attached to them is to be removed. The more men come into contact with you, the more they will be attracted and deeply impressed by your wonderful stamina and strength, manliness and manhood and your tremendous capacity for action. You are heroes in the field of action and should not waste your time over ordinary matters. A man who is born must die. And each one shall depart when his term is over."

As guru, he warned his monks to not hold personal agendas: "If each acts according to his own plans and ideas, then disunity, dissensions, divisions and disputes will step in. If, heedless of others' ideas and feelings, the monks go on with their individual ideas and desires, then the enormous strength of the Sangha will fall to pieces. The monks must relentlessly sink their own whims and hobbies in the great will of the guru and must behave according to His commandments, teachings and injunctions. Then and only then will the will and power of the guru work smoothly through all."

In 1924 Acharya set up "mobile preaching units," which today number seven. These are groups of ten or more sadhus that carry Acharya's teaching to the masses. They travel with a team of musicians who perform bhajan and kirtans. They are on the road for a year at a time, traveling by train to save money. They gather each year in Banaras for

## A Sadhu-Led Organization

(Counter-clockwise from upper left) The young boy to Swami Pranamananda's right became BSS General Secretary Swami Buddhanandaji Maharaj (below), who passed away on January 26, just as this article was going to press; BSS swamis in Sivaratri procession in Ballygunge, Kolkata, February 12; Swami Debobratandaji; Swami Biswatmanandaji performs arati during guru puja







Durga Puja and to consult and coordinate the coming year.

In the morning from 6 to 9 am, all the sadhus go door to door preaching and collecting funds for the BSS work. In the evenings, they conduct bhajan, kirtan and satsang. The collections are a main source of income for the organization. When calamity strikes, the preaching groups head up relief missions with other volunteers.

In 1927, Acharya officially formed the Bharat Sevashram Sangha, with the monks as the trustees, led by him. This compact chain of command allows the massive organization to shift focus easily in response to urgent situations. *Bharat*, of course, means India; *seva* means physical and spiritual service; *ashram* implies a system based on the ideals and practice of renunciation, self-control, truth, continence and honest labor; and *sangha* means a fellowship or brotherhood. Acharya choose the word *sangha* in part because of its association with Buddha and the Buddhist Sangha of monks, with a longevity of 2500 years.

The BSS mission statement stresses service and education: perpetuation of the monastic community; moral and spiritual regeneration; service to humanity, irrespective of caste, creed or national origin; spread of moral, spiritual and physical education; reconstruction of Hindu society; teaching of yoga and related health science subjects; education through moral and spiritual publications; tribal welfare and uplifting of the weaker sections of society.

#### BSS in Action

Acharya's zeal and early activities set the

pattern for the BSS. In the 1920s, Bengal suffered a famine. Acharya and his close disciples, along with 500 students, went door to door collecting cash and rice for distribution in the famine-struck areas of the Sunderban region. Their efficient success attracted public notice and support.

Acharya's goal was to eradicate untouchability from Bengal and to unite the so-called backward Hindus with the mainstream Hindus, as part of his drive for independence. He felt the divisions of Hindu society helped keep the British in power. His message was one of developing or reclaiming strength and power.

The Bengal region was crucial to Britain's hold on India. Acharya encouraged and inspired the freedom movement here, though he did not directly engage in revolutionary activities. He did skillfully engineer the development of village defense forces, *rakshidal*, and their successful use to suppress communal violence. He believed that proper preparations for self-defense by the Hindus would create security and forestall violent outbreaks. He criticized Gandhi's nonviolent approach, which he found too passive.

Going from village to village, he got Hindus of all castes to enjoy food together. As a result, untouchability is today less of an issue in Bengal than elsewhere in India. Similarly, he performed yagnas in the villages and invited everyone, including the women and lower castes, to chant the Vedic mantras with him.

In 1935, Acharya developed the concept of Hindu Milan Mandirs, which BSS translates as "great religious meeting place." These

centers for daily worship and teaching are run by family devotees under the guidance of the sadhus. If support is sufficient, they may acquire land and a dedicated building. Acharya intended that the Mandirs serve as a common center for all Hindus, including the untouchables and tribals, to work in unity and cooperation.

He encouraged householders to seek initiation. No preparatory study was required, but the person must be a Hindu and have faith in the Hindu scriptures, the teachings of Acharya and the BSS organization. In his time, Acharya personally initiated large numbers of people. Today, candidates usually come to the Kolkata main ashram and speak directly with the senior monk. After ascertaining their sincerity, he sets a date for the initiation and gives them mantras to chant in preparation. He explains to them that after the initiation they should be pure vegetarians and do regular japa and meditation. They are enjoined to maintain a high standard of cleanliness and conscientiously fulfill the duties of householder life.

The mantra given at initiation, to be kept secret, is generally aligned with the devotee's personal Deity. A worshiper of Siva, for example, might be given the mantra "Aum Namasivaya." Usually, the general secretary or an authorized senior monk gives the initiation. In the event the candidate cannot travel to Kolkata, any of the monks may be authorized by the headquarters to give the initiation.

The Milan Mandir, Acharya directed, should be a center of religious awakening, social reform and cultural revival, includ-



## Sadhus Introduce Modern Skills to Replace a Disappearing Lifestyle in the Tribal Areas



ALL PHOTOS: BSS

(Clockwise from left) BSS swamis explain rope making to tribals in the Lorhai district in West Singhbhum, Jharkhand State; sale of saris made at the Sabarnagar handloom project provide steady income to the women; a tribal student at the Sundarnagar Hostel; Kundrukuttu school and tribal hostel in West Singhbhum with 300 students; a tribal mother and child







ing reconversion of Christians and Muslims to Hinduism. A single Mandir might today have 50 to 500 devotees, and some have developed into full-fledged BSS centers with monastics in residence. There are more than 500 Mandirs worldwide today. When convenient, the preaching parties stay at Hindu Milan Mandirs or BSS centers; but they also venture into new areas, staying at temples or homes of householders.

BSS has reconversion efforts in areas where Christian missionaries are active.

Through a havan or yagna (a purifying fire ceremony), 30 or 40 supplicants at a time are welcomed back into Hinduism. Acharya pointed out that the ancient Hindu rishis converted millions and accommodated them into society, expanding Hindu society in large increments. He lamented, "The Hindu society, as it stands at present, is still steeped in meaningless superstitions and conservatism and is not ready to tolerate reconversion and re-accommodation of the renegades and the tribals. What is needed

is to wake up the sleeping masses." The BSS has been criticized and attacked by some for its reconversion activities.

Acharya observed in his life, "After a thousand years' slumber, the Hindus are bound to get up. I shall compel each one of them to count his beads by saying, 'I am a Hindu,' 'I am a Hindu.' I shall infuse in them great strength. The Hindu has learning, intelligence, wealth and capability. They also form the majority; and when there is unity among themselves, they will become indomitable in the world. Through the Mandir, all the problems of the Hindu families and society will be solved."

Disaster relief has been a BSS speciality from its founding. They are able to mobilize thousands of volunteers within hours of putting out a call. According to Swami Biswatmananda, "When Bangladesh became independent in 1971 and millions of refugees swarmed into India, our swamis took jeeps into the 16 districts of Bangladesh itself to distribute relief material."

BSS has seven ashrams in Bangladesh, managed by 11 swamis. Swami observes, "Life for Hindus in Bangladesh is gradually becoming better. There is less pressure under the new government. A few years back, things were not that good. But we are not able to do reconversion work there. Swami Pranavananda remains a respected figure in Bangladesh, and all school children read his life story in their textbook. Unfortunately, the work suffers from lack of government support and public donations.

Today the BSS is established in dozens of countries of the Indian diaspora. These include Fiji, UK, Central and South America



BSS



(Guyana, Trinidad, Suriname, etc.), US and Canada. They have been particularly effective and popular in Guyana, which has produced more than 15 monks, including Swami Nirliptananda of the London branch and Swami Parameshananda (both of whom assisted with this article) of New York. The current president of Guyana, Bharrat Jagdeo, once taught in a BSS school and remains friendly with the organization. BSS holds consultative status as a NGO with the United Nations Economic and Social Council.

### My Experience with the BSS

In early December, 2010, this reporter was instructed by HINDUISM TODAY to prepare a feature story on the organization. This would not be my first encounter with BSS. In researching earlier HINDUISM TODAY articles, I have had the exceeding good fortune and blessings to attend over the last decades all four Kumbha Melas: at Prayag, Nasik, Ujjain and Haridwar. At each, I visited the large BSS camp promoting Acharya's teachings and the organization's work. At the Kumbha Melas, the BSS is most prominent not for their religious work but for their team of lifeguards. These expert young swimmers, wearing saffron-colored banners around their bodies, work closely with the official river police to ensure the safety of pilgrims taking their holy bath. Such service, I was to soon discover, is typical of the BSS mission of stepping in where help is needed most.

My research began at the BSS main ashram, in the Ballygunge area of South Kolkata. When it was first established, the land was completely undeveloped. Now, it is a posh,

upscale community, with the ashram occupying over an acre of prime land. Entering through an unexpectedly narrow corridor, the visitor finds an expansive area containing the temple, large reception hall, administrative offices and quarters for the monks.

Shortly after my arrival, I participated in the evening arati, with hundreds of devotees and 20 of the monks of all age groups performing the worship and chanting the Vedic mantras. I soon met Swami Biswatmananda, the headquarters' chief coordinator, who took several hours out of his busy schedule to answer questions and introduce me to Swami Abhayananda, a senior monk serving as BSS Joint Secretary. The latter swamiji explained the thinking behind their style of worship: "During the Muslim rule, our people were separated from our scriptures. Gargi, a lady, was an expert on Vedas, yet we started saying that women could not study and recite Vedas. Then it was said that only brahmins could study Vedas, and no one else could. Others who tried to study were mistreated and punished. But Acharya Pranavananda said that everyone is entitled to study Vedas and everybody can recite 'Aum.' He said everybody could participate in the performance of yagnas or havans, including reciting the mantras and making offerings. Every Sunday we conduct such a yagna at each of our centers."

The next day, I met Swami Buddhananda, who is BSS General Secretary and one of the few remaining direct disciples of Acharya. Eighty-eight and suffering from various ailments, he delighted in showing me a charming photo on his wall (see page 20) of himself at the age of ten with Acharya.

"Early in life, I realized that this was the path for me," he said. "When I used to go to my home, I felt as if someone had compelled me to go. However, when I was in the ashram, I felt at home; I felt that this is where I belong. Since my childhood, I understood this. I came in touch with Acharya in a very natural manner. Acharya Maharaj told me that I was connected to him for many past births." Just as this article was going to press, I was informed that Swami Buddhananda had passed away—my interview with him the last he was to give.

Later, I was shown the rooms that house the portraits of Acharya's direct disciples, men who had joined Acharya while still young and spent their entire lives in service of the Sangha. Each was garlanded with fresh flowers, and the perfume of incense filled the rooms. Householders and monks alike visit these rooms to seek blessings.

### Monastic Training Center

In the evening, I visited the BSS training center in the Gaudiya colony of South Kolkata, about ten kilometers from the headquarters. This center, where 50 monks are in training, is located on several acres of land, with a Siva temple in the middle. When I arrived, a dozen brahmacharis, beginning monks, were reciting slokas from the *Bhagavad Gita* as part of their evening routine, then singing bhajans.

Swami Girishananda, who heads this center, explained that in addition to the monastic training, the center provides medical assistance, an ambulance service for the needy, a computer training center and a hostel for 20 school children ages 10 to 15. The chil-

## Providing Disaster Relief and On-Going Medical Assistance



BSS

(Counter-clockwise from above left) Mass free feeding in Sunderban following the disastrous Aila cyclone in 2009; a medical clinic in Nepal; the new, state-of-the-art, 500-bed BSS hospital at Joka in Kolkata; a BSS team reaches into remote areas by boat; Swami Parameshananda distributes vitamins to poor children



RAJIV MALIK



BSS



BSS





dren attend government schools, and they receive religious education at the center. They even perform some of the temple ceremonies. Swamiji said, "We try to teach them and treat them with love. There is no physical punishment given to the children, even when they do not strictly follow the rules."

I spoke with Sevak Biswajeet, 31, a brahmachari trainee from Assam who joined BSS in 2009. He explained, "I am a graduate and have studied many religious books. After I realized that this world is an illusion, I decided to leave the world and come here. Now I have no connection with my parents. I want to attain God in this very birth. When I was connected to the world, I faced so many problems and sorrows. But now I feel God is always with me, and that keeps me blissful."

Sevak Shishir, 29, also from Assam, joined in 2007. He told me, "By joining BSS, I am able to serve the guru, society and country. Lord Krishna has said in the *Gita* that by leaving the world, you come under His shelter. This has also inspired me to take this path, and I am very happy with my decision. No family wants their child to leave home and become a sannyasin. But then everybody has his own *samskaras* (tendencies). India has hundreds of millions of people, but how many choose this path? So far as I am concerned, God and Acharya Maharaj have brought me here."

The next day, I was driven to the outskirts of Kolkata to visit BSS's huge 500-bed hospital which serves the city residents and the poor villagers of the adjacent Twenty Four Parganas district. Though the hospital opened just last year, the outpatient department already handles 1,000 patients a day. Brahmachari Suranjan Maharaj, one of the



Large weekly yagna ceremonies are a feature of BSS centers

young monks looking after this project, told me the Sangha has hospitals and clinics all over India, but this is their first big multi-specialty facility. It stands on a large plot of land slated for future expansion.

#### Service to the Tribal Peoples

On December 14, I took the early morning train to Jamshedpur, accompanied by Swami Bishnu Maharaj, a young BSS sadhu and photographer. Jamshedpur, or "Steel City,"

was built in the 1920s by Jamshedji Tata as a huge industrial complex near the area's iron mines. The BSS center here began as a Milan Mandir and developed into a seven-acre campus with a temple, four schools and residences. According to Swami Shivaroopananda, the senior monk here, they have nearly 2,400 students commuting from their homes—675 in English medium schools and over 1,700 in Bengali schools. In addition, student hostels house 520 tribal children,



including children from what are called the "primitive tribes."

The "tribal" people, by way of clarification, are those original inhabitants of India who maintained a tribal culture of living in the forests, practicing limited agriculture and having no fixed homes. Many of them have been influenced to a great extent by modern civilization—if it is accurate to call our culture "modern" and theirs "primitive." After all, it is they who maintained ecological harmony with nature for millennia. In general, tribals now practice more agriculture and have set up permanent housing.

The truly primitive tribal people are different. They are still trying to live as they have for the last several thousand years. However, their very existence is threatened by the encroachment on their forests, the onslaught of modern disease and alcohol abuse. It is to this group of primitive tribals that BSS has done its most outstanding and innovative outreach, likely saving them from extinction. The free resident school here is part of that program. BSS has succeeded where the government has failed. Even the Catholics turned over one of their tribal projects in this area to the BSS rather than let it fail.

We traveled next to the Sunder Nagar Tribal Girls School, about 20 km from Jamshedpur. Founded in 2006 as the first school in the state just for tribal girls, it has 100 students and is completely free. It is an exemplary school, neat, clean and obviously well run by its elderly managers, Ashish Ranjan Dasgupta and his wife, Anubha. The girls have learned to chant Vedic mantras and have adjusted to the BSS vegetarian diet. Ashish Dasgupta told me, "They are all

tribal and primitive tribal girls. Some of their tribes have already disappeared, and others are just fading away. These children come from the areas which are affected by the Maoist insurgency—and may even include some children of the Maoist leaders." The girls I spoke with were smart and confident, a good sign of the quality of training they are receiving at the BSS school.

The school was built with funds from the Indian Government's Ministry of Tribal Welfare. I learned that the BSS has always had mixed feelings about accepting government aid. Prior to independence, the British had, of course, no interest in helping the group. Initial relations with the Congress Party in the 1950s were not smooth; BSS was regarded as too Hindu for the party's taste, and, in any case, the government is particular about whom it allows to deal with the tribals. Their willingness now to work with BSS is a strong endorsement. In recent years, the organization has cautiously accepted state funding for some of its education projects.

Acharya also warned the monks not to accept donations from rich people which came with strings attached. Far better, he counseled them, to collect small donations from those who gave freely, expect nothing in return and will not interfere with the work.

Leaving the girls' school, we went to a tribal craft center run by Vinod Murmu and his wife under the auspices of BSS. Acharya set up many such craft centers during his lifetime to provide backward Hindu communities a means of income.

Murmu related his story: "My mother was a leprosy patient. Though her disease was being treated, still she was already disfig-

ured. The villagers were so afraid the disease might spread to others that they burned down our house and forced us to run away. The BSS swamis took care of my mother and educated my sister and myself. After my schooling was complete, I was sent to Ludhiana in Punjab to learn knitting. Now I run this knitting center and teach the skill to my tribal people."

The last stop of our day was a leprosy center run by BSS in the Burma Mines area of Jamshedpur. It was begun with government aid, but that was later withdrawn. Swami Devobratnanda explained that when the government deemed that leprosy had been eradicated, it ceased funding the work—leaving existing lepers without help. A local industrialist, Raj Kumar Agarwal, stepped in, but the center's upkeep has suffered. Patients' stories here were much the same as Murmu's. Durlabh Gope, head of the colony, told me, "Our own families abandoned us, but BSS has treated us as if we were their own."

We returned in late evening to the Jamshedpur main center. I was impressed to see the temple full of tribal boys joined in the chanting of mantras and singing of bhajans, in stark comparison to their brethren in the big cities who spend their evenings watching soap operas on television.

The next day would be quite special, as we were traveling into Sabarnagar, one of the primitive tribal areas. Not many years ago, visitors would have been met with warning shots from unclad tribal archers! On our way, we stopped at Debanki village, 40 km from Jamshedpur, to visit a boys school and adjacent handloom weaving center. Another 80 km into the forest, we arrived at Sabarnagar.

## Secular and Religious Education through "Preaching Parties" and Schools



(left to right) A procession at Bajitpur, Bangaldesh, birthplace of Swami Pranavananda; Swami Abyaktanandaji, a preaching party leader; class at BSS girls' school; tribal girls dance at the Sundarnagar residence school







The area was quiet, with hardly a vehicle or even a bullock cart in sight, not to mention any sign of electricity or running water.

Swami Devabratanaanda offered some background: "Fifty years ago, the government tried to care for the tribals of the area; but, they made little progress, and finally asked BSS to take over. We drafted a program to train the men in agriculture and the women in weaving, and to educate the children. We started with just 50 families. Once the Sabar community saw that those families were earning an income, tribe members from distant villages started to come here. They are doing very well. Today, those who used to live naked are making clothes for others." In the successful handloom center here, we saw a dozen looms worked by women with young children by their side.

Swami explained that BSS helps the women open bank accounts in which to deposit part of their income. "Families which once did not have even a bowl of rice to spare now have a savings account. This is the singular achievement of BSS."

The work has not been easy. With their traditional life completely disrupted, the tribal men took to drinking cheap country liquor all day. The swamis have managed to instill in them enough discipline that they come to work on time and at least confine their drinking to the evening hours.

Previous attempts to introduce the tribals to agriculture here were hampered by the lack of irrigation water. After the BSS installed a well and pump, farming became more successful. Some of the tribals earn 50

rupees a day working the farm. They are delighted with the job, as there are few opportunities for them anywhere else.

Rajeshwar Giri, headmaster of the school in Jamshedpur, explained, "Tribals have their own castes or communities, and all of them have their own separate puja systems. Mostly it is our Hindu Gods that they worship, but with different names. Many of these tribes worship their own *kula devatas* [local or family Deities]. However, the kids here learn to participate in the pujas at the temple and listen to the discourses."

Sarthi Mardey, an arts teacher at the Hindi-medium girls' school in Jamshedpur, herself a tribal, explained, "We as tribals worship mother nature. We worship the trees and the leaves. We also celebrate Diwali and Durga Puja. We worship Mara Guru, who is Siva, and even the five Pandavas of the *Mahabharata*. We find ourselves closer to Hindus and Hinduism. I feel it is wrong to mislead the tribals and try to convince them that they are closer to any religion other than Hinduism. Once the children have studied in this school, they will be very confident about themselves and not easily converted."

From Sabarnagar, we traveled two hours to Ghatshila, a small township surrounded by forests and graced by the Subarnrekha River. Here the BSS has 42 acres of land with two schools, one for 150 boys and one for 110 girls, a weaving center, a luggage factory and several agricultural projects, including mushroom production. According to Brahmachari Vikas, head of the project, the luggage center is thriving. BSS has its own retail outlets

for the products, and sales are good, with retail prices ranging from Rs. 20 to Rs. 400.

The next day, in Jamshedpur, we visited the English-medium, coed BSS Pranav Children World, with 700 students and classes up to the tenth standard. It was here the photo on the opening spread of this article was taken with Swami Shivaroopananda. This school, catering to a somewhat more prosperous clientele, charges Rs. 400 per month per child—less than any other private school in the area. I saw a large number of parents outside the office of the principal, Sumita Dey, all trying to enroll their children. Many wanted their children there specifically because it was run by the dedicated BSS team of Hindu swamis.

Dey said, "Most of our teachers are spiritually inclined, and that is helpful in inculcating good moral values in the children. Corporal punishment is absolutely banned. No sticks are used to discipline the children. Instead, we talk to the child and explain that breaking the discipline is not good for them. We also look into their home life and see if something there is affecting their behavior. In an extreme case, we may suspend the child; but even then, after a few days, the child may come back reformed." Several children reported to me that due to the religious and moral education at school, they have become better behaved and more courteous with their parents and teachers.

The dedication and commitment of Acharya's disciples are slowly revolutionizing the lives of the tribal communities through education. Who is to judge whether this new



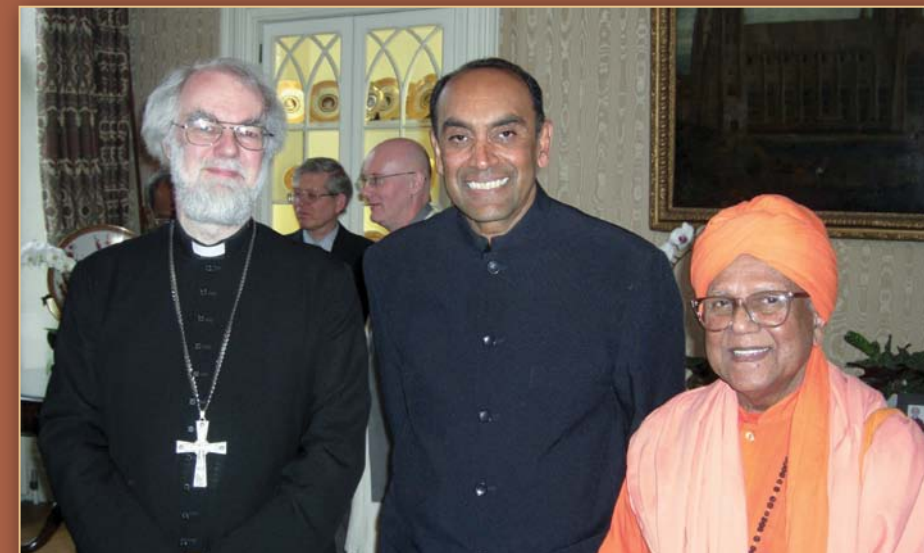
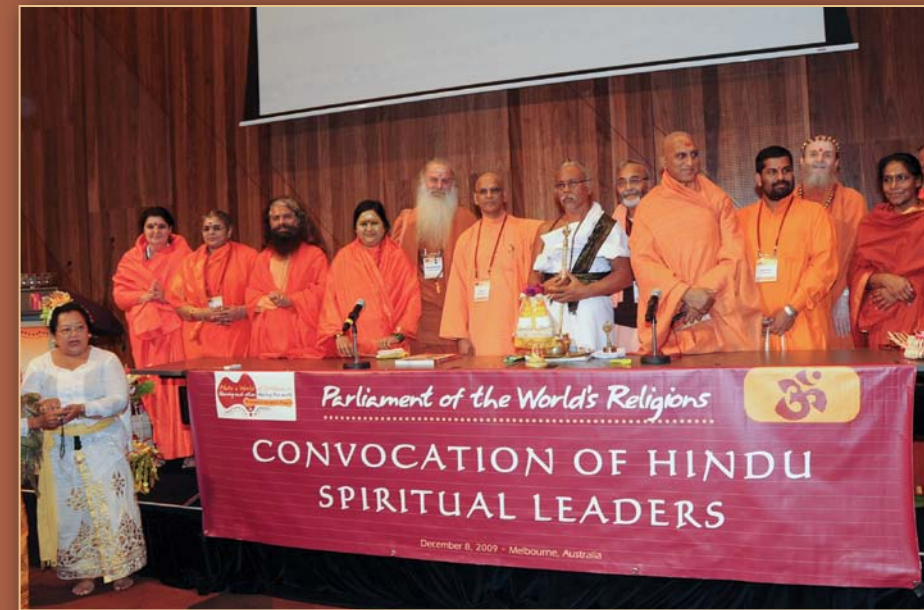
way of life is better than what they have lived for thousands of years? But it is certain that the old way is gone, and a life of poverty and alcoholism should not be the sole alternative.

### "Carry On"

During my visit with the BSS, I had an unusually direct experience of the swamis' detachment and dedication. One night, while interviewing some young volunteers in Swami Biswatmananda's room in the Kolkata headquarters, I was informed that one of the elder swamis had passed away. His body had just been brought to the temple a few yards from me. When Swami Biswatmananda came to pay his respects to the departed soul, I asked if I should leave off the interviews. I was firmly told, "Carry on."

The scene was reminiscent of Acharya's own passing, at which time there were 82 monastics in his order. On his deathbed, he decreed that none of the monks, even Swami Satchidananda, who was to succeed him as president of the Sangha, was to leave his present tasks to be near Acharya. They were told to carry on, regardless of their affection for him. And so also this elderly swami, in the ancient tradition of sannyas, was honored in his passing but not mourned. His brother monks paused but briefly before being told, as I was, to "Carry on." At that moment, I felt as if Acharya himself had uttered those potent words which sum up his whole philosophy of karma yoga.

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## BSS Brings Hindu Faith and Ideals to the International Religious and Political Discourse



(Counter-clockwise from left) Swami Parameshananda as part of an American delegation (including Rev. James Parks Morton, at Swami's left) seeking better understanding between Americans and Syria; BSS Swami Biswatmanandaji in Kokata joins a march with other religious leaders against terrorism; Swami Pranavananda Maharaj; Nepal students; Swami Nirliptananda of London BSS with the Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, and Professor Anantanand Rambachan; Swami Parameshananda at the Parliament of the World's Religions in Melbourne, Australia, 2009 (center, to the right of the Balinese representative who is dressed in white)







# Giants Who Reawakened Indian Dance

Freed from the label of brutish exoticism, Indian dance flourished in Europe through the efforts of talented performers and their unlikely Russian muse

BY KUSUM JOSHI, UNITED KINGDOM  
*This is the third and final part in a series of articles about Indian dance in the West.*

**B**Y THE EARLY 1900S, EUROPE AND America had seen non-Indians performing their own mélange inspired by Indian dance (like Ruth St. Denis) or temple dancers, the devadasis. It was then that a new wave of artists dazzled the West with superb performances, Indian in style but European in stagecraft.

This came about because of a benign confluence of art lovers. On one side were the liberal British intelligentsia, who turned their eyes to the East and liked what it saw. From another side, the most successful ballerina of her time, the influential Anna Pavlova, exerted her might to revive the arts of Indian dance.

## The UK's Awe for India

The shift in the West's perception of India was gradual but decisive. In Britain, it started in the first decade of the 20th century. Key proponents included Sir William Rothenstein, artist and Principal of London's Royal College of Arts; Dr. Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy, an archaeologist turned art historian and Indophile; and a small group of leaders from various art fields.

This pro-India movement was sparked by a quarrel. In a meeting of London's prestigious Royal Asiatic Society on 13 January, 1910, Sir George Birdwood expressed contempt for Indian fine art, saying its symbolism "outrages artistic sensibilities, virtually regarding art as but a framework for its myths, and allegories, and strange semiological devices."

Disgusted by Birdwood's narrow interpretation, Sir William Rothenstein and his group published a letter in support of India's distinctive creative genius. His manifesto in *The Times* (the newspaper read by the British cultural and social elite) was signed by 12 important Britons in the fields of painting, sculpture, decorative arts and art education, including George Frampton, a prime founder of the New English Art Club; Charles Waldstein, archaeologist and Slade Professor of Fine Arts at Cambridge; and William R. Lethaby, a highly influential architect. (Read their India-friendly manifesto on page 31.)

India's champions among the British intelligentsia did not confine themselves to the



Uday Shankar in the 1930s

COURTESY DR. JOAN L. ERDMAN

realm of words. They promptly set up the India Society, aimed at familiarizing people in the West with Indian art and culture. They created new publications about India and organized talks and exhibitions.

The India Society's leading members, such as Rothenstein and Lady Christiana Herringham, utilized their strategic links with established British art groups. The Art Workers Guild and the New English Art Club, for example, assisted in featuring the work of eminent Indian painter-engraver Mukul Dey and also displayed copies of his Ajanta paintings.

Earlier India extravaganzas in the West

had portrayed Indian culture as primitive, glorifying the British Empire and the impact of British colonial rule on India. The India Society's exhibitions were distinguished by their positive intent. Along with other sympathizing organizations, they wanted to inculcate a better understanding and appreciation of Indian art and creativity in the West. In large part, they succeeded.

## A Russian Godmother for Indian Art

The most important European dancer of the early 20th century was Russian *prima ballerina* Anna Pavlova, a friend of Rothenstein. Widely regarded as one of the finest classical



ballet dancers in history, Pavlova held India and India's art and culture in high esteem.

When she first visited India, she yearned to witness classical Indian temple dancing, but all she could find were amateur girls dancing. Indian dancer Ram Gopal describes her search: "She implored the wealthy and educated Indians to show her something of the mystic and exquisite Hindu dances she had always somehow known India possessed tucked away in her remote vastnesses, and yet the invariable reply Pavlova got was that temple dance did not exist in India any longer! Kathakali, Kathak, Bharatanatyam—these were as hidden and unknown to the immortal Pavlova as they were to the wealthy and socialite Hindus. The classic dances, she was told repeatedly on both her tours to India, were dead."

The late 19th century reformist movement, spearheaded by British administrators and Western-educated Indians, had labeled devadasis as "temple prostitutes," successfully driving them underground, away from the public eye. But Pavlova never gave up. In her travels and performances around the world, she met talented Indian artists. Her desire to meet India's legendary temple dancers, combined with her stature as a classical artist, inspired some of them to return to their homeland to seek out, salvage and develop their own ancient Indian classical dance heritage.

Pavlova eventually found three immensely talented young Indians with the potential to become traditional dancers but who were pursuing other careers. They were Uday Shankar, an aspiring painter; Leila Roy, a musician; and Rukmini Devi, a classical ballerina that looked like "a double of Olga Spessivtseva," in Ram Gopal's words. By convincing the trio to return to their roots, and by teaching them the secrets of modern stagecraft and theatrical production, Pavlova had a momentous impact on Indian classical dance.

Pavlova's love for India had a profound effect on Western classical dance as well. So impressed was she by the ethereal beauty of the paintings in the Ajanta caves that, not long after returning from her first Indian tour in 1922, she developed a ballet called *Ajanta Frescoes*. Under Indian inspiration, Pavlova also developed *Hindu Wedding* and *Radha and Krishna*, traditional ballet choreographies infused with India's color and vibrant orientalism.

## Uday Shankar

Foremost among those inspired by Pavlova was Uday Shankar. Before meeting Anna Pavlova, he had planned to be a painter. In 1920 he enrolled at the Royal College of Art in London, where he distinguished himself and won a prestigious award. This attracted the attention of Rothenstein, head of the



**A legend:** Anna Pavlova, widely revered as the greatest ballerina of all time, was the first to tour ballet around the world. Her technical skills were not perfect, but her ardor and creativity on stage are unmatched to this day. (Below) The 1910 pro-India art manifesto.

fine arts section of the College, who took young Uday as his protégé.

Destiny would bring interesting turns. Uday's father, Dr. Shakar Chattopadhyay, a Sanskrit scholar with an MA in political science from the University of Geneva, was also a sensitive man with artistic inclinations. Wanting to honor Indian soldiers who were distinguishing themselves while fighting alongside Allied forces in the First World War, Dr. Chattopadhyay wrote and produced a ballet and asked his talented son Uday to create the choreography. The ballet was staged in London's Covent Garden, raising

funds to help Indian war veterans.

The details have been lost to history, but during that production Uday and Pavlova met. Soon after, Uday left the Art College to pursue dance. Rothenstein, who held his Indian protégé in high esteem and had great expectations of him as a painter, was disappointed: "I urged Uday Shankar to reconsider his decision. Later I learned that Uday had joined Pavlova in America. I thought of him as a lost soul."

Despite Rothenstein's disappointment, he was awestruck when he later saw Uday Shankar perform. "I saw at once I had been

**W**e, the undersigned artists, critics, and students of art, find in the best art of India a lofty and adequate expression of the religious emotion of the people and of their deepest thoughts on the subject of the divine.

We hold that the existence of a distinct, and potent, and living tradition of art is a possession of *priceless* value to the people of India, and one which they, and all who admire and respect their achievements in the field, ought to regard with the utmost reverence and love.

Confident that we here speak for a



very large body of *qualified* European opinion, we wish to assure our brother craftsmen and students in India that the school of national art in that country, which is still showing its vitality and its capacity for the interpretation of Indian life and thought, will never fail to command our admiration and sympathy so long as it remains *true to itself*.





wrong; Uday Shankar's dancing, his poise and gestures, had grace and gravity. The musicians had the same gravity as they sat before their sitars, vinas and drums. And the women! What exquisite gestures in their hands, what reticence in their movements. I had been shocked more than once seeing so-called Indian dances by [Western] women whose immodest dress and movements were entirely without the delicate sensuality of the Indian Bayaderes. There was a religious atmosphere throughout Uday's entertainment. I went behind after the performance to offer my congratulations. Catching sight of me, he at once left the circle surrounding him and bending low, to my embarrassment, he made the gesture to take the dust from my feet."

Uday Shankar's success as a dancer in Europe in the 1930s was due in no small measure to his association with Pavlova. He worked for about a year as a choreographer and dancer in her ballet company, touring Europe. During this time, Pavlova gave him invaluable insights and experience that molded his future career as an Indian dancer on the world stage.

Working with Pavlova shaped Uday into a disciplined artist and familiarized him with the essential elements of successful stagecraft. Above all, she goaded him to develop his dance not by looking westward, but by turning his gaze towards the traditions of India. It was she who urged him to seek inspiration from the treasure house of his own Indian cultural background, folklore and heritage.

During the late 1920s, Uday Shankar and his associate Alice Boner spent a year traveling all around India. Alice was a Swiss sculptor and designer who loved India. They used the tour to observe, learn and acquire whatever they felt would be useful in fulfilling their artistic aims. They examined ancient Indian sculpture and paintings in the Buddhist caves at Ajanta and

the Hindu temples of Orissa and the Deccan. They observed various Indian dance styles, both classical and folk. To enlarge his repertoire as a dancer, Shankar made a selection from the gamut of Indian hand gestures (*hasta mudras*) and gained mastery of the nine basic emotions—the *navarasas*—described in Bharata Muni's ancient Indian dance treatise, *Natya Shastra*.

Uday Shankar never tried to perfect a specific Indian dance style. Instead, he picked whatever appealed to him from every dance style he saw. His Uday Shankar Company of Hindu Dancers and Musicians reflected his confidence and the sweep of his creativity and ambition. He built up and carted with the tour an array of 150 musical instruments, including the sitar, vina, sarangi, sarod, wind instruments like the shehnai and various flutes as well as diverse percussion instruments from all over India. Before setting out from India, he also roped in some of his close relatives, most importantly his little brother Ravi Shankar, who would one day become a world-famous sitarist.

#### A Triumphant Debut in Paris

Once back in Europe, the troupe rehearsed rigorously for their debut at the Theatre des Champs Elysees on March 3, 1931. Success smiled on them, and the Uday Shankar Company of Hindu Dancers and Musicians was a big hit in France. Shankar would go on to become a pioneer of modern dance in India, a world-renowned Indian dancer and choreographer. Known for adapting Western theatrical techniques to traditional Indian classical dance, he effectively placed Indian dance on the world map.

His programs often juxtaposed contrasting forces or qualities. Though the style, spirit and theme of his dances were Indian, they were meticulously planned, crafted, cut to size, fitted to Western tastes, shorn of repetitious movements and presented with modern lighting effects. Secondly, he introduced diversity and color to generate a variety of moods. He utilized orches-

tral music as well as ancient and classical dance themes, all the while emphasizing the strengths of Indian dance, such as the exquisite play of opposites in Siva/Shakti dances. Thirdly, with the help of Alice Boner, he paid attention to details of dance costumes, jewelry, music and props. Finally, in keeping with the original purpose of Indian dance, his performances had an uplifting, spiritual quality.

Shankar enthralled European audiences and left them with a deep impression of the beauty, mystique and grandeur of Indian dance. But his mentor, Pavlova, never saw his triumph. She contracted pneumonia in January, 1931. When her doctors told her she would survive but never be able to dance again, she refused any treatment; "If I can't dance, then I'd rather be dead." Three weeks later she died, days before her 50th birthday and barely a month before Shankar's debut in Paris. But Anna, creator of the role *The Dying Swan*, had forever changed the course of both Eastern and Western dance.

#### The Magnetic Madame Menaka

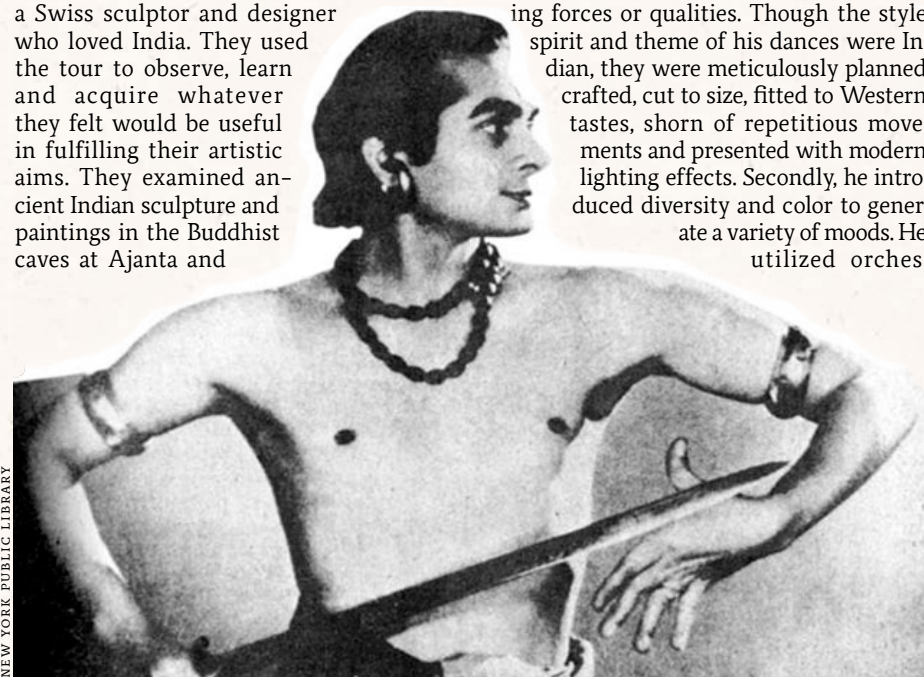
Another dancer inspired by Pavlova was Madame Menaka, whose original name was Leila Roy. Born to an English mother and a Bengali father, Leila was drawn to the stage from an early age. But performing in public was not considered respectable, and her father, an English-educated high court lawyer, discouraged her.

After Leila moved to India with her sister, Mira Chatterjee, the two defiantly joined a dance group set up by Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay and her Bohemian poet/actor husband Hirendranath Chattopadhyay. Leila's friendship with Princess Indira Raj, of the princely state of Baroda, also exposed her to the arts. At that time, she was a flute player, not a dancer. Anna Pavlova, who was also an acquaintance of the Princess, befriended Leila and encouraged other aspirations.

Her formal training in dance began after she married Colonel Dr. Sahib Singh Sokhey, another friend of the Princess of Baroda, a scientist in the Indian Medical Service of the British Indian army. Sokhey possessed the sensitivity of an artist and was quick to spot the artistic vision and cultural potential of his talented wife.

With her husband's support, Leila was availed the best teachers and soon mastered Kathak dance. Though she was a bold woman, she was also a traditionalist who loved the purity of Indian dance and arts. She associated with artists and patriots involved in India's struggle for freedom from British rule,

**On the road:** (left) Uday Shankar's energetic "Dance of the Swords" provided the perfect counterpoint to the gentle grace of his troupe's more feminine dances



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KALAKSHETRA PRESS

such as Rabindranath Tagore, poetess Sarojini Naidu and Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, an active supporter of India's traditional arts and crafts.

In keeping with Indian classical dance traditions, Leila regarded dance not as a method of entertaining audiences or a means of self-expression, but as an elevating spiritual activity. In an article published in 1933, she explained: "I cannot lay too much importance on the fact that one must master all the traditional technique. We must strenuously discourage all attempts to bluff the public by senseless posturing and posing on the stage. We do not want our dance to become an exotic and erotic presentation for the delectation of the West. It must express the life and emotions of our nation and not be mere ethnographic posturing."

Leila established her own dance troupe in 1934 and started dance classes for new students from non-devadasi backgrounds at her residence. That same year, she staged her first dance drama, *Krishna Leela*, at the Opera House in Bombay. During her short but packed dance career, other significant new dance dramas that she choreographed and staged were *Deva Vijaya Nritya* (1935), *Menaka Lasyam* (1938) and *Kaliyamardan* and *Malavikagnimitram* (both in 1939). Different but not bound by tradition, she discarded traditional Kathak lyrics and took the help of trained musicians to create orchestral ensembles, a break from the traditional way Indian music was played.

Thus her productions were a clever merger of traditionalism and innovation. The artistic input she received from high-caliber artists and teachers lent her work authenticity and sophistication—effects that Anna Pavlova had encouraged. After founding the Menaka Indian Ballet company, Leila became known as Madame Menaka. Her enthusiastic husband, taking advantage of a brief official trip for attending an international Intergov-

ernmental Conference on Biological Standardisation in Geneva, launched his wife's company on a spectacular Indian dance tour (1935-1938). The Menaka Indian Ballet found themselves dancing at important venues in numerous European capitals. Their tour culminated at the International Dance Olympiad at Berlin in 1936, where Madame Menaka won first prize. Basking in public acclaim, she was invited to the nascent movie industry, choreographing black-and-white, silent movie productions in Germany and England.

#### Rukmini Devi's Bharatanatyam

The third Indian artist to benefit from Anna Pavlova's sphere of influence was Rukmini Devi Arundale, whose biography was featured in the October/November/December 2007 issue of HINDUISM TODAY.

Rukmini Devi had first seen the famous Russian ballerina perform while visiting Bombay with George Arundale, her English husband, who was a prominent associate of Annie Besant in the Theosophical Society at Adyar. She and Pavlova became friends during a ship journey to Australia.

At the time, Rukmini Devi was solely interested in the purest Russian ballet, at which she excelled. But Pavlova urged her toward traditional Indian dance, just as she had done with Uday Shankar and Leila Roy, and encouraged her to help lift it from its precarious state.

In order to reenergize South Indian temple dancing, dedication and talent were not enough. Rukmini Devi also needed conviction and the courage to flout social restrictions and taboos—which she had demonstrated in her controversial choice of the much older Arundale as a husband. Devi started in the 1930s with the revolutionary step of seeking out and learning the art from a devadasi, Mylapore Gowri Amma, and *nattuvans* (male teachers of dance from Tanjore). While learning the dance, Rukmini

**Stars of East and West:** Madame Menaka, left, and Rukmini Devi, right, enchanted Europe and invigorated Indian art

Devi refined it to be socially acceptable, replacing the most erotic elements with devotional pieces.

By 1935, she performed at the Diamond Jubilee Convention of the Theosophical Society in Madras. She was dressed in a most decent fashion, in spotless white, silently proclaiming to the world the purity, dignity and spiritualism of her dance, which she presented under the name Bharatanatyam. This term, which earlier included any form of dancing along the principles enunciated by Bharata Muni in the *Natya Shastra*, thus began to connote (as it does today) a distinct form of classical South Indian dance.

#### Conclusion

India's British rulers had dethroned Indian dance from its exalted position, scorning and demonizing it as cheap, erotic public entertainment instead of a sacred expression of worship. Uday Shankar, Leila Sokhey and Rukmini Devi Arundale, three artists from India's cultured middle class, under the aegis and creative genius of Anna Pavlova, gave Indian classical dance new form, while earning recognition both in India and abroad.

They did not re-establish the *devadasi* system or restore classical dancing to the temples. But they democratized Indian dance, making it open to people from all classes and groups, either as performers or as part of an enthusiastic audience. With boundless creativity and a wealth of traditional resources, these three artists elegantly demonstrated to the world the timeless élan of India's art and culture, helping dispel the notion of India as a primitive and inferior country suitable for foreign colonial rule. These were freedom fighters, wielding no weapons but beauty and grace.





ALL PHOTOS: KRISHNA GIRI

## YOUTH

# The Hindu Mandir Executives' Conference

Reflections on the state of Hinduism in America, the ever-increasing importance of temples and the young leaders who must soon take the reins

BY TEJAS DAVE

I HAVE OFTEN HEARD THE QUESTION, "WHY DO WE NEED TEMPLES when God is said to be omnipresent, existing everywhere?" Let me answer by saying this: air is everywhere, but we still need a fan to feel that air. God is everywhere, but we need a mandir to feel God's presence.

Our Hindu Dharma has made tremendous contributions and progress within American society since the introduction of our eternal religion here by Swami Vivekananda over a century ago. Fewer than 20 years later, the United States saw the establishment of its first mandir, the Vedanta Center in Boston, by Swami Paramananda. In the 100 years since then, more than 500 mandirs have been built across the United States and Canada, serving the religious needs of over two million Hindu Americans.

These temples, 10,000 miles from the Hindu motherland, have become sanctuaries for prayer and centers of devotion. In addition, they provide a haven for celebrations, festivals and other customs toward the continuation of our heritage. Mandirs serve to inspire and unite the Hindu community—recent immigrants as well as those born in America.

Our temples also address other challenges faced by Hindus born

away from their ancestral home—the need to inculcate Hindu philosophy in the new generation and to hold children's classes to impart Vedic knowledge. As a result, our American mandirs have become centers of learning.

And yet, while these great strides have been made, mostly by first-generation Hindu Americans, the wheel of time continues to turn. Soon it will come time for a new generation to assume leadership of Hindu mandirs and organizations and expand them even further, to adequately fulfill the needs of an ever-growing population. It is for this reason that the Hindu Mandir Executives' Conference (HMEC) was convened. It was not to reminisce upon the past, but to envision the future. The purpose of the conference is to build a better future, a future that continues to be protected by the umbrella of Sanatana Dharma.

I would like to make it clear that while we seek to continue our Hindu faith into the future, we must also accept the existence of all other religions. In his 1893 address to the World Parliament of Religions, Swami Vivekananda stated that all paths eventually lead to the same goal, and that is God. We must embrace the philosophy of *vasudhaiva kutumbakam*, "all mankind is one family."



**Texas-size gathering:** (clockwise from left) The attendees of the fifth annual Hindu Mandir Executives' Conference, held in Houston on October 22–24, 2010; members of the Conference's Coalition of Hindu Youth enjoy a group discussion; youth leader Tejas Dave addresses the closing session of the conference, sharing the conclusions of youth sessions

As we approach this future over the next few years, we must ensure that temples do not become simply architectural marvels for society to gawk at while passing on the road. Temples must retain their sanctity. An electric fan, no matter how expensive, will do no good if it is not plugged in. Similarly, temples must remain connected to their source of energy, God, through the continuity of religious practices and social services. Service to man is service to God.

The purpose of the HMEC is to understand these issues and the rapidly changing needs that our community faces. As our numbers continue to grow and our age spectrum continues to broaden, it will be necessary to further enhance the mandir's role in our lives. For the torchbearers of Hindu tradition and current leaders of Hindu temples, it is now time to search for, nurture and train the protectors of this legacy into the future. And for college and high-school students, such as myself, it is now time to understand the rich and vast culture that we are charged with sustaining. It is time for an active effort to enfranchise and empower the next generation of leaders.

This conference has taken big steps toward that goal. We, the Coalition of Hindu Youth, the future of this community, now stand united, with a clear understanding of what we must do. Throughout the conference we voiced our opinions about and learned the value of these mandirs, and we have made these mandirs our own. Now it is up to us to take the torch passed to us by our role models, the first-generation Hindu Americans, and ensure that the flame of Hindu unity and spiritual prosperity will be everlasting.

Let me end with the theme of the conference, which comes from the *Rig Veda*: "Let us be united. Let us speak in harmony. Let our



minds apprehend alike. Common be our prayer; common be the end of our assembly; common be our resolution; common be our deliberations. Alike be our feelings; united be our hearts; common be our intentions; perfect be our unity."

LEARN MORE ABOUT THE HINDU MANDIR EXECUTIVES' CONFERENCE AT [HMEC.VHP-AMERICA.ORG](http://HMEC.VHP-AMERICA.ORG) AND THE COALITION OF HINDU YOUTH AT [WWW.CHYNETWORK.ORG](http://WWW.CHYNETWORK.ORG)

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# Our Sacred Earth

Mother Earth is suffering so much, I feel so sad. We don't have reverence for our Mother Earth; that is why in modern times we are mercilessly using all of this modern equipment and chemicals. There is so much pollution. Thought pollution is the worst—so many negative thoughts. When we have the spiritual flavor in life, we are never going to entertain these negative instincts in the mind. The mind will become so pure because of meditation and true devotion. With that devotion we will become selfless, and then Mother Earth will feel comfortable with us in her lap. Our holy rishis give us many remedies, including daily yajna using medicinal plants, which heals nature.

AMMA SRI KARUNAMAYI

EDUCATIONAL INSIGHT

## Hinduism and The Environment

By Matthew McDermott

Ishavasyam idam sarvam – “This entire universe is to be looked upon as the Lord.”

Shukla Yajur Veda, Ishavasya Upanishad - 1

The above three words in Sanskrit and eleven in English express the essential Hindu outlook on the world. It is a reverential attitude towards all of life, from the smallest animal and tallest tree, to the longest river and mightiest mountain, and even the stars and planets. Writing in *Living with Siva*, Sivaya Subramuniyaswami urges: “Let’s worship the Earth. It is a being—intelligent and always giving. Our physical bodies are sustained by her abundance. When her abundance is withdrawn, our physical bodies are no more. The ecology of this planet is an intricate intelligence. Through sacrifice, which results in tapas and sadhana, we nurture Mother Earth’s goodwill, friendliness and sustenance. Instill in yourself appreciation, recognition. We should not take advantage of all this generosity, as a predator does of those he preys upon.” ¶ On the Abrahamic view of man and world, Swami Dayananda Saraswati shares, “If one believes that God created the Earth with its flora and fauna for human consumption and pleasure, the attitude cannot be expected to be kind to nature.” ¶ A quick glance at the headlines of the science and environment section of any major news outlet in the world today—let alone specialist publications dedicated to covering ecological issues—shows that it is the latter attitude and not the classically expressed Hindu viewpoint that holds sway in the world today, no matter the continent or nation. The Hindu Declaration on Climate Change, presented in December 2009 at the Parliament of the World’s Religions in Australia, expresses clearly the state of affairs: “Our beloved Earth, so touchingly looked upon as the Universal Mother, has nurtured mankind through millions of years of growth and evolution. Now centuries of rapacious exploitation of the planet have caught up with us, and a radical change in our relationship with nature is no longer an option. It is a matter of survival. We cannot continue to destroy nature without also destroying ourselves.” ¶ How far we have drifted from the reverential sentiment expressed in “My salutations to you, O Bhudevi, consort of the all-pervasive Lord, forgive me for placing my feet upon you.”





## Climate Change in Photos

THOMAS KELLY, PHOTOGRAPHER

Most of the photos in this Insight were taken by Thomas Kelly, a resident of Nepal, as part of project called Climate Change Globally, in which he documented the impact of global warming in Nepal, Mongolia and South America. He writes: "I captured



THOMAS KELLY

images showing deforestation in the Himalayan regions, major flooding in the southern Nepal belt (ripping apart and silting of agricultural land), the change of bird migration patterns, the permafrost melting in northern parts of

Mongolia leading to invasive shrubbery taking over lichen fields (a favorite and essential food for the reindeer), an invasive plant species *Mikania micrantha* (Michaha Jhar) that is spreading at an alarming rate in Chitwan National Park (strangling indigenous plant and tree life and affecting the eating patterns of the Greater One-Horned Rhino), the aggressive water hyacinth spreading over fishing ponds (impacting fishing patterns), glacial lakes bursting, the drying up of high Himalayan forests (resulting in forest fires), the drying up of water springs needed for drinking (irrigation is also drying up, and the water mills used for grinding wheat have stopped). It's incredible what a ripple climate change can have. You wouldn't think builders would be affected, but of course they are. Construction experts say traditional knowledge about how to build houses is dying out. Now homes have thinner walls and the roofs need less support. It just isn't as cold as it used to be, nor does it snow as much, so we're forgoing traditional insulation and construction techniques and materials."

*Ether, air, fire, water, earth, planets, all creatures, directions, trees and plants, rivers and seas—they all are organs of God's body. Remembering this, a devotee respects all species.*

SRIMAD BHAGAVATA MAHAPURANA (2.2.41)

WHEREVER YOU LOOK IN HINDU SCRIPTURE, YOU FIND REFERENCES reinforcing the central pillar of Hindu environmental thought: All is God, all is Divine, all is to be treated with reverence and respect, all is sacred. As O.P. Dwivedi points out, three grand concepts build on this truism: *Vasudeva sarvam* (the Supreme resides in all beings); *Vasudhaiva kutumbakam* (the family of Mother Earth—the original "global village"); and *Sarva bhuta hita* (the welfare of all beings) (*Hinduism and Ecology*). Add to those the law of karma—by which the effects of our deeds return to us—and you have a deep repository of ecological thought and practice.

At the highest level, there is no distinction in composition between the world we perceive and the Divine. Rather than being created out of a separate substance, the universe and everything within it, the planet we inhabit and everything upon it, is emanated from the Divine. The process of creation is analogous to a spider creating its web. The *Mundaka Upanishad* states: "As a spider spins and withdraws its web, as herbs grow on the earth, as hair grows on the head and body of a person, so also from the Imperishable arises this universe" (1.1.7).

The *Brihadaranayaka Upanishad* (2.5.1) speaks of creatures and the creation: "This earth is honey for all creatures, and all creatures are honey for this earth. This shining, immortal person who is in this earth and with reference to oneself, this shining immortal person who is in the body, he, indeed, is just this self. This is immortal; this is Brahman; this is all."



THOMAS KELLY

**Nature's new severity:** (left) Deforestation in Nepalese middle hills results in the washing away of precious topsoil during monsoons, river silt-up and swollen rivers carving greater swaths, taking away valuable agriculture land. Banks of upper watersheds are breaking, flooding lower areas.



WISE EARTH MONASTERY

## By Harming Earth, We Harm Ourselves

SWAMI MAYATITANANDA, WISE EARTH MONASTERY

Hindu thought envisions the Earth as divine: the body of the universe is God; the Earth is the Goddess (Bhudevi). India is a sacred land connected by thousands of pilgrimage routes leading to sacred places, considered themselves to be Gods and Goddesses. Infinite numbers of Deities represent Nature; Agni, the fire of manifestation, is central to this theme. ¶Because we humans are intricately replicated from the identical principles of the cosmic nature, the seers recognized that changes caused due to indiscreet human activities would result in imbalances in seasons, rainfall patterns, crops and atmosphere, and degrade the quality of water, air and earth resources. In so doing, the human memory and intelligence, as a self-organizing, self-generating organism, becomes dull and potentially inert. This, in turn, affects our relationship to self-wisdom and our interactions with nature's resources.

### Vasudeva Sarvam, Divinity in All

The attitude of *Vasudeva sarvam* bestows reverence for all things. It contrasts starkly with the dominant outlook today, rooted in scientific materialism and dualistic Western metaphysics, in which humans are separate from nature and God is separate from both. While Western civilization considers human life to be sacred, Hinduism views all of life, all of existence, as sacred. The mainstream of the modern environmental movement recognizes the folly of taking more from nature than can be perpetually regenerated—but only because the eventually resulting ecosystem collapse would cause harm to humans. In general, the environmental movement stops well short of recognizing intrinsic value in what is nonhuman. Frequently, it denies the sacred altogether.

### Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, Global Village

Once we understand that everyone and everything we see is an expression and emanation of the Divine, we naturally embrace the globe as a village, *Vasudhaiva kutumbakam*. As Dwivedi expresses it, Mother Earth "supports us with Her abundant endowments and riches; it is She who nourishes us; it is She who provides us with a sustainable environment; and it is She who, when angered by the misdeeds of Her children, punishes them with disasters." Dwivedi's words are an apt paraphrase of the *Atharva Veda's* 63-verse Bhumi Sukta, Hymn to Earth, which focuses on nature and the dependence of humans upon Mother Earth, how She does not discriminate between species. To Her, all are important.

Dwivedi highlights a prayer for the preservation of the original fragrance of the Earth so that it can be sustained for future generations, and another specifying that when digging is done in the Earth, it should be done in a way that no serious damage is done to Her body or



## An Ancient Peace Chant

May the Goddess Waters be auspicious for us to drink. May they flow, they flow, with blessings upon us. May the Earth be pleasant and free of thorns as our place of rest. May She grant us a wide peace. May the Divine Waters which grant us blessings, may they sustain us vigor and energy, and for a great vision of delight. May we partake of that which is their most auspicious essence, as from loving mothers. May the Heaven grant us peace, and the Atmosphere. May the Earth grant us peace, and the Waters. May the plants and the great forest trees give us their peace. May all the Devas grant us peace; may Brahman grant us peace. May the entire universe grant us peace. May that supreme peace come to us. May that peace dwell in me. Take this firm resolve: May all beings look at me with the eyes of a friend. May I look at all beings with the eyes of a friend. May we all look at each other with the eyes of a friend.

SHUKLA YAJUR VEDA (36.12-15, 17-18)  
TRANSLATION BY VAMADEVA SHASTRI



SHUTTERSTOCK



DINODIA

**The Impact of Automobiles:** Transportation is one of the greediest energy consumers and one of the largest sources of greenhouse gas and other air pollution. The contribution of fossil fuel-based transport to a country's total emissions varies from nation to nation. In rich nations, and increasingly in rapidly expanding economies such as China, India and Brazil, motorized transport is one of the most important areas in which we can reduce our environmental impact. Powerful reductions can be achieved through moving away from the internal combustion engine and toward electric-powered transport and increased bicycle usage, along with greater public transportation and construction of more walkable communities.

## HINDUISM & THE ENVIRONMENT

appearance. Each reinforces the understanding that humans are not separate from the environment and have no authority over it, other species or other humans.

The modern scientific concept expressed in the Gaia Theory—of Earth being a giant, self-regulating organism seeking to create optimal conditions for life—is not far removed from the views expressed in the Prithivi Sukta (another Vedic hymn to Goddess Earth), even though the modern theory makes no reference to the Divine, or to conscious causality or emotion in the creation of natural disasters. However, with a slight shift of perspective, it is easy to see the connection between the challenges we are experiencing (global warming and the ensuing host of environmental changes) and our misdeeds toward Mother Earth. We have unbalanced the atmosphere through excessive greenhouse gas emissions and wantonly destroyed precious forests for logging and conversion to agriculture. The resulting upheavals can be viewed as the manifestation of a natural response, as the Earth attempts to restore a more natural order and thus protect her many and varied forms of life.

### Sarva Bhuta Hita, Welfare of All Beings

Once we understand Mother Earth's protection of life, we can understand how humans should act toward one another and all other forms of life. Thus, we arrive at *Sarva bhuta hita*, "enhancing the common good of all beings." When we know that all is sacred, all is God, and we are all children of Mother Earth, our behavior and even our desires change accordingly. We want to enhance the common good and balance our individual needs with those of the extended family of life. It becomes natural to follow dharma. But even then, it is not necessarily easy to determine the best course of action for supporting the common good in specific situations.

### Karma

An understanding of karma ties together these three grand concepts, informing us that our current condition is the combined product of our past actions (in this life and previous incarnations) and actions that we take today. In this way, we are constantly creating our future, in the months, years, decades and even lifetimes to come. Clearly, our actions also influence our family and community, today and into the future.

Consider climate change, one of the most pressing environmental issues of our time, as a lesson in karma. How did we cause greenhouse gas concentrations to rise so high that they are forcing myriad climatic changes? Through well over a century of burning fossil fuels, through cutting down forests and through increased raising of animals for meat. Many of our parents, grandparents and great-grandparents (to a lesser degree) all did this without thought of the future consequences. Indeed, it wasn't until the last decades of the 20th century that we began to recognize that there might be a long-term problem with this behavior. It's clear as day: we, the human race, created the threatening circumstances we and future generations now face. Our environmental karma is of our own creation.

As a global civilization, we continue the same practices today, even though the negative effects are becoming more and more apparent by the month. In some ways, it will be extremely hard to stop our harmful practices, not to mention reversing the damage we have already caused.

Who will suffer the worst of the environmental problems we have created? Certainly not our parents. Even those of us who are adults today may not bear the brunt of them. It will be our children,



HINDUISM TODAY

## Perhaps It Is Possible to Bring Forth a New Era

DR. ARVIND SHARMA, PROFESSOR OF COMPARATIVE RELIGION AT MCGILL UNIVERSITY, MONTREAL

**T**here is the doctrine of the four yugas. We are living in the Kali Yuga, which started around 3102 BCE. This is the worst of all the four ages, and things are going to go downhill. However, there is a very important point which is often overlooked. The same texts that talk about these ages, like the *Manusmriti*, also say that the king is the maker of the age. That is, the sequence of the ages can be reversed by a political initiator, to put it in modern idiom. This is found in the *Mahabharata* and in many scriptures from ancient India in which the king said that he established the golden age in this age of the Kali Yuga. So here we have a very clear provision of intervention to prevent environmental degradation, especially by the state.



## God Is Everywhere

YOGINI SRI CHANDRA KALI PRASADA MATAJI,  
SRI KALI GARDENS ASHRAM, ANDHRA PRADESH

**H**indu philosophy is based on the truth that there is one Supreme Power that is the sustaining force of the entire creation. Personal transformation starts with realization of this Supreme Power within one's own self. The aspirant will then be able to experience that power all around him. Thus he understands that this power is universal, nondual, indivisible and eternal. He sees unity in diversity. He will not see his fellow human beings as different from him and so does not fear. Such a person is full of compassion and unlimited love. He will work towards peace and prosperity of not only mankind but all of nature. This is accomplished only through faith and surrender to that Supreme Power and under the able guidance of the spiritual teacher who is an embodiment of that power. Healing the Earth is possible by exchanging ideas and restoring spiritual values. Peace is much needed in today's world. Unless each individual changes his behavior and thinking for his own progress and for the world at large, peace cannot be established.



ARSHA VIDYA PITHAM



THOMAS KELLY

**The Price of "Progress:"** (Right) Kayapo Indians from the Xingu Reserve in Brazil watch as a bulldozer relentlessly carves a road through the forest to give loggers access to harvest the natives' precious mahogany trees.

## HINDUISM & THE ENVIRONMENT

grandchildren and great-grandchildren who suffer the consequences.

Supposing a forest at the headwaters of a large river is excessively cleared. The loggers may accrue immediate economic benefits, but over the years great numbers of animals may die due to habitat loss, and disastrous flooding may result as hillsides wash away and cause blockages downstream. Similarly, emissions of invisible greenhouse gases create atmospheric overload and dangerous climatic changes decades after the actions that caused them. Such long-term environmental changes, one leading to another, cannot be easily halted or reversed.

### The Five Elements

In the Hindu conception of the cosmos and the environment, the five great elements (*pancha mahabhutas*) are central: space (akasha), air (vayu), fire (agni), water (*apas*) and earth (prithivi). All emanate from prakriti (cosmic matter). Though each element has its own form and characteristics, all are interconnected and interdependent. The *Taittiriya Upanishad* tells us: "From Brahman arises space, from space arises air, from air arises fire, from fire arises water, and from water arises earth."

Akasha, space, is the most subtle of the five, and there is no place where it is not. Akasha is not nothingness, like the popular conceptions of outer space; on the contrary, akasha is absolute fullness. K.L. Seshagiri Rao explains, "Akasha represents openness, brightness, expansiveness and the fullness of blooming capacity."

Vayu, air, manifests on Earth as the atmosphere, the protective blanket of gases that surrounds the planet, regulating temperature and preventing excessive solar radiation from reaching Earth's surface. Air connects and affects everything, from animals breathing in and out, to plants exchanging oxygen for carbon dioxide. Weather, which so

defines daily life, is a function of air in collaboration with the other elements. Even rocks are subject to wind erosion.

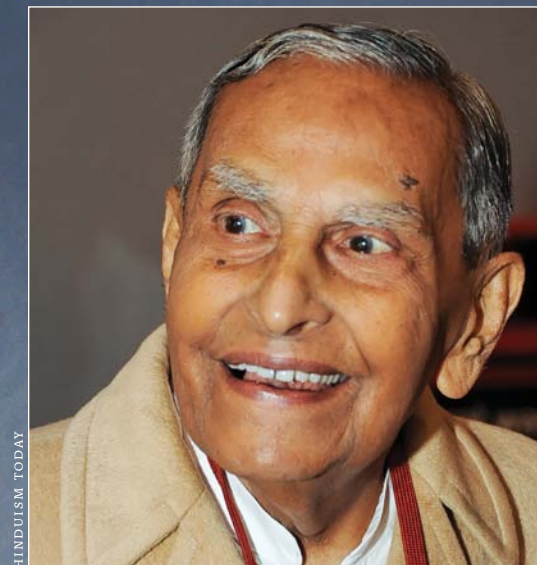
Agni, fire, has been worshiped since ancient times. Fire purifies, fire destroys, fire inspires. From the Sun, to lightning, to fire in its mundane and sacred forms, agni brings warmth and visibility to the world. The *Vedas* sing its praises: "I magnify the Lord (Agni), the divine, the priest, minister of the sacrifice, the offerer, supreme giver of treasure. To you, dispeller of the night, we come with daily prayer, offering to you our reverence" (*Rig Veda* 1.1.1&7).

Water, *apas*, is the source and sustainer of life. Its immense sacredness is rivalled only by its practical value to human agriculture, health, enjoyment and the development of civilization. In the form of Earth's rivers, water is so vast in its life-giving and life-sustaining properties that it is worshiped as the mother of life, as Mother Ganga.

Earth, the densest of the five elements, is the ground upon which life takes place. It is the body of the Divine, a living organism, metaphysically, metaphorically and biologically. Hindus have cognized this for millennia, knowing that all creatures are intimately connected to the Earth. Without its gifts we are nothing. In the latter half of the 20th century, modern science has caught up with this truth, conceiving of Earth as a self-regulating organism called Gaia, a name for which Dhara, Bhudevi or Bhumi—Hindu names for the Goddess—could easily be substituted.

Though self-regulating and dynamically interacting, the five great elements of existence can be pushed out of balance by human action, creating conditions inhospitable to life in general. What are the imbalances confronting the Earth?

Akasha is being thrown out of balance through excessive and constant noise, as is found in modern cities and towns with never-ending motor vehicle traffic, the hum of air conditioners and computer servers,



HINDUISM TODAY

## Stop All Killing & Exploitation

DADA J.P. VASWANI, SADHU VASWANI  
MISSION, MAHARASHTRA

**R**eference is the root of Hinduism, reverence for all life. People worship trees, they worship mountains, they worship the universe, the spiritual world. Now it is all gone. Hinduism can save the world from global annihilation. Hinduism has the potency and the power. But today people don't pay attention to our great ones. ¶It has seemed to me that there can be no peace on Earth, that there can be no peace among nations, until we stop all killing. Stop all killing! No sentient creature must be killed. If I kill an animal for food, I will not hesitate to kill a fellow human being whom I regard as an enemy. Humanity will learn one day that there is no other way to peace than vegetarianism. Life is a gift of God. ¶Among all the creatures, man is the only one who has been given the power to meddle with the ecological balance. Therefore, he has great responsibility to see that all types of life are preserved. All life should be regarded as sacred, for there is but one life that flows into all. This one life sleeps in the mineral and the stone. This one life stirs in the vegetable and the plant. This one life dreams in the bird and the animal. This one life is awake in man.





DINODIA

## HINDUISM & THE ENVIRONMENT

blaring music, omnipresent advertisements appealing to the lower aspects of our being, televisions and video screens shoehorned into every available space. Needless to say, repose, reflection and sattvic living become difficult in such conditions.

Unbalanced *vayu* is seen in air pollution, especially over cities. This is caused by industrial activity, power generation from fossil fuels, and the exhaust of internal combustion engines. Brown smog is the most visible form of air pollution, but an excess of greenhouse gases also upsets *vayu*, causing climate change, raising temperatures and acidifying oceans. Any disturbance to *vayu* can also interfere with *agni*, as in its solar form *agni* is the energy which heats the air, powers the water cycle, and helps enable life to grow. Each of those processes is affected by pollution.

The element water has been drastically disturbed by human activity. We have dumped human sewage and industrial effluent into rivers and oceans; farmers have irrigated so aggressively that water tables have become lowered, and have allowed runoff of chemical fertilizers and pesticides into streams; we have built massive dams and diverted entire rivers at the expense of wildlife and the people who live in the watersheds; and we have disposed of non-biodegradable trash and plastics in rivers, ponds and wetlands. The same activities that unbalance *vayu* and *agni*, causing climate change, also affect water, causing ocean acidification, coral bleaching and glacial melting.

Earth unbalanced is the most obvious. Vast tracts of forest are cleared for timber and agriculture—often for industrial monoculture farming or cattle ranching. Mining for coal, bauxite, gold and hundreds of other minerals scars mountainsides and removes mountaintops. Human demand for resources—extremely inequitable between rich and poor nations—is causing habitat loss and species extinction at a level unprecedented in the modern history of the planet. Human population is increasing at the expense of

virtually every other species. To sustainably supply our current levels of resource consumption would require one and one half planets. By 2030, that increases to two planets. We can hope that a new balance will eventually be reached; but the vast majority of climate scientists say that in that new balance, the Earth will be less fertile than now. Earth has undergone radical changes many times. Ice ages come and go in predictable cycles. Species are decimated and new life emerges. Temperatures oscillate, oceans rise and fall. This is not the first challenge to life Earth has faced, but it is the first in which we, the human race, are playing a major role.

### Treatment of Other Creatures

The Hindu vision of existence and this planet is replete with examples of how consciousness permeates everything, from the obvious and animate (humans, animals, plants) to the less obvious and inanimate (rivers, stones, mountains). No part of existence is without the divine presence. Nothing exists separate from God. The practical manifestation of this understanding is the virtue of *ahimsa*, nonviolence in thought, word and deed. Seeing the presence of God in all life and therefore not harming it is the foundational ethic of Hindu thought.

The Hindu reverence for the cow epitomizes this respect for all creatures. The cow symbolizes all other animals and the Earth itself. It is the nourisher, ever-giving and undemanding, representing life and the sustenance of life. The cow is generosity incarnate, taking nothing but water and grass and continuing to give and give milk. It also symbolizes dignity, strength, endurance, maternity and selfless service. The cow and her life-giving gifts, foremost among them milk and ghee, are essential in Hindu worship. Through the labor of the bull, where mechanized agriculture is not the norm, fields are plowed and grains and vegetables are grown. Veneration of the cow instills the virtues of gentleness,



ADICHUNCHANAGIRI MATH

**True wealth:** (Left to right) Men encircle an endangered rosewood tree, the largest in Yanaipallam, Tamil Nadu; thousands of potted saplings being propagated for the fifty-million tree project (sidebar at right); Sri Balagangadharanatha Swami takes part in ceremoniously planting a teak tree



ADICHUNCHANAGIRI MATH

## Fifty Million Saplings

**M**other Earth is adorned with mountains, hills, plains, heights, slopes, forests, plants and herbs. Strength-giving and nourishing, She takes care of every creature that breathes. She gives shelter to all who are seekers of truth, who are tolerant and have understanding. ¶Much has been said about protecting the environment, but the common man must understand how he can contribute to this effort. Protecting the environment and making the world a better place for all living beings starts right from our house. Plant trees. ¶His Holiness Jagadguru Sri Sri Sri Balagangadharanatha Swamiji, 71st pontiff of Sri Adichunchanagiri Mahasamsthana Math, resolved to maintain the ecological balance by adorning Mother Earth with a new patch of green. In association with the government of Karnataka, Swamiji formed the Karnataka Vanasamvardhana Trust with the goal of planting five crore saplings (50 million). The project was completed in 2010 with the help of several organizations. Swamiji provided tree guards to protect the plants and supplied tractors to help with the work. His message is, "Come, let us join together in protecting the environment; each one of us is required to contribute to reduce our carbon footprint on this Earth."

receptivity and connectedness with nature. Protection of the cow is important both ethically and practically.

Mahatma Gandhi observed, "One can measure the greatness of a nation by the way it treats its animals. Cow protection to me is not mere protection of the cow. It means protection of all that lives and is helpless and weak in the world. The cow means the entire subhuman world."

We may question whether the subhuman world is weak and helpless. In many ways, it is modern humans that are the helpless ones, absent high technology. But Gandhi's words are profound at the core. The way in which a people treats animals—with respect and dignity on one end of the spectrum, or as commodities for human ownership, use and disposal at the other—says much about them and likely indicates the way in which they treat one another as well.

A central part of treating animals with respect is not killing them for food. That said, both traditional and current Hindu teachings contain various views on meat-eating. Priests and religious leaders, as well as those people pursuing yoga and meditation, tend to be vegetarian. On the other hand, soldiers, police officers and others whose duties require the maintenance of aggressive qualities generally eat meat. Furthermore, many people may eat primarily vegetarian diets out of economic necessity as much as ethical virtue, but will eat meat on special occasions.

Swami Dayananda Saraswati cites the *Tirukural*, saying, "Killing animals and eating their flesh is against all morality." Swami Tyagananda of the Ramakrishna Order offers, "In the tradition I come from, we are not fanatic about vegetarianism, but we recognize that food that is filled with *sattva*, which is vegetarian food, can be helpful in one's own spiritual practice." Professor Arvind Sharma reminds us that historically Hinduism has been more guarded than Jainism in espousing strict vegetarianism: "A passage in the *Manusmriti* says there is nothing wrong with eating meat or drinking wine, but abstention therefrom is highly meritorious. It's a no-fault position; you can eat meat, but it's better not to."

However, knowing what we do now about the impact of a meat-centric



## What Will it Take to Avert Dire Climate Change?

The average per-capita carbon footprint for people living in the United States is approximately 18 tons per year, though it has fallen in the past few years due to recession. The average in Europe is about half that, with China coming in at about 6 tons. In India the number drops to roughly 2 tons. If the goal is to keep temperature rise below 2° Celsius—the threshold above which many dangerous climatic changes are said to become unavoidable—and if we accept that every human has the right to similar levels of development, then 2 tons is roughly what each human being needs to produce. In this one statistic the enormity of combatting climate change becomes clear.

**Changing Landscapes:** (Right) In this section of Brazil, cattle farming has replaced the tropical rainforest; (below) increasingly, wind turbines offer an alternate source of energy in many regions of the world



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diet on the environment—combined with modern problems of hunger and land use, plus deplorable modern methods of raising livestock—the merits of a vegetarian diet go far beyond furthering an individual's spiritual progress. Adopting a vegetarian diet benefits everyone and everything. It dramatically lowers one's environmental impact, since raising animals for food requires far more resources, in terms of energy and land, grow than growing vegetables of the same caloric value and nutritional content.

The modern industrial, chemical-based farming methods of growing grains and vegetables are damaging to the environment, but the factory farming of animals is even more so. A study carried out in the Netherlands revealed that if enough meat eaters adopted a vegetarian diet, the costs of mitigating the damages caused by climate change would be reduced 70 percent by 2050. Even if large numbers of people merely stopped eating meat from ruminant animals, the cost of combatting climate change would drop by 50 percent. (<http://bit.ly/climate-diet>)

### What Can We Do?

Humanity will not make progress in resolving the myriad environmental problems we face without dedicating time, effort and willpower. Determined action is needed on all levels: personal, community and national. Even in ancient times—when the world population was much sparser than today and our potential impact was miniscule in comparison—rulers and rishis alike recognized that guidance and regulation of human activities was needed to protect the environment.

In numerous places, the *Vedas* and other scriptures encourage environmental protection. "Do not harm the environment; do not harm the water and the flora; Earth is my Mother, I am Her son; may the waters remain fresh,

do not harm the waters. . . . Tranquil be to the atmosphere, to the earth, to the waters, to the crops and vegetation." The sacred law books are even more specific, for example: "Let him not discharge urine or feces into the water, nor saliva, nor clothes defiled by impure substances, nor any other impurity, nor blood, nor poisons" (*Manu Samhita* IV. 56). Fines are specified for offenses against the environment, such as damaging trees. Professor Arvind Sharma explains, "Harming a tree was considered on par with physical assault of a person. In one verse Manu tells us how much you have to compensate a person you have physically injured. In the next verse it says: 'For injuring any kind of tree a fine should be imposed proportionate to its utility.'"

Three types of forests were identified: *shivan*, forests that provide prosperity; *tapovan*, forests for contemplation; *mahavan*, natural forests where all species can find shelter. Vedic scholar and environmental campaigner Ranchor Prime shares, "Once some of the original forest was cleared, . . . Vedic culture required that another kind of forest be established in its place. To completely remove the forest was simply not acceptable. It was the source of natural wealth, such as fodder, timber, roots and herbs. Moreover, the trees guaranteed the fertility of the soil and purified the air and water."

In recent memory, and historically, we have a number of examples of communities and individuals applying the principles of good environmental stewardship that are latent in Hindu thought.

The Bishois, founded by Guru Jambheshwar in the 15th century, are sometimes called the first environmentalists of India. Originally from the Marwar area of Rajasthan, they now number one million and live more widely across India, practicing environmental conservation, protection of trees and animals as part of daily religious duty. Two of the sect's 29

## Hindu Virtues Versus Consumerism

Hinduism's numerous classic restraints and practices, the *yamas* and *niyamas*, offer lots of practical guidance for those wishing to minimize their impact on the environment. If we are to observe non-stealing, *asteya*, we cannot use natural resources at unsustainable rates; when we do



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so, we jeopardize the life of future generations. This is effectively a form of stealing. If every human on the planet consumed resources at the level of the United States, we would

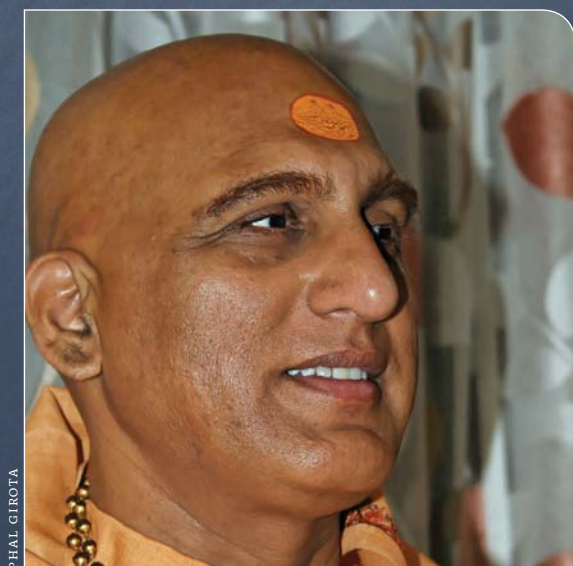
need 4.5 earths to supply everyone's needs. That decreases slightly if everyone lived like the average European or Japanese citizen, but still not to ecologically sustainable levels. To reach that point, consumption like that of the average Thai citizen, or less, is required. ¶ If more people practiced *santosh*, contentment, we would greatly reduce the impact of consumerism on the planet—from rising greenhouse gas emissions, to chemical pollution, e-waste from countless short-lived electronic products, and the myriad consumer goods that get used and thrown away each year in the wealthy and growing nations of the world. Contentment involves living in constant gratitude for your health, your friends and those belongings which you do own, not complaining about what you don't possess, as well as viewing every moment in life as an opportunity for spiritual growth and development. All of this has great positive environmental impact. Being contented in the moment, living in the eternal now, insulates you from consumerism, allowing you to embrace a simple life, caring for what you have and living within your means.



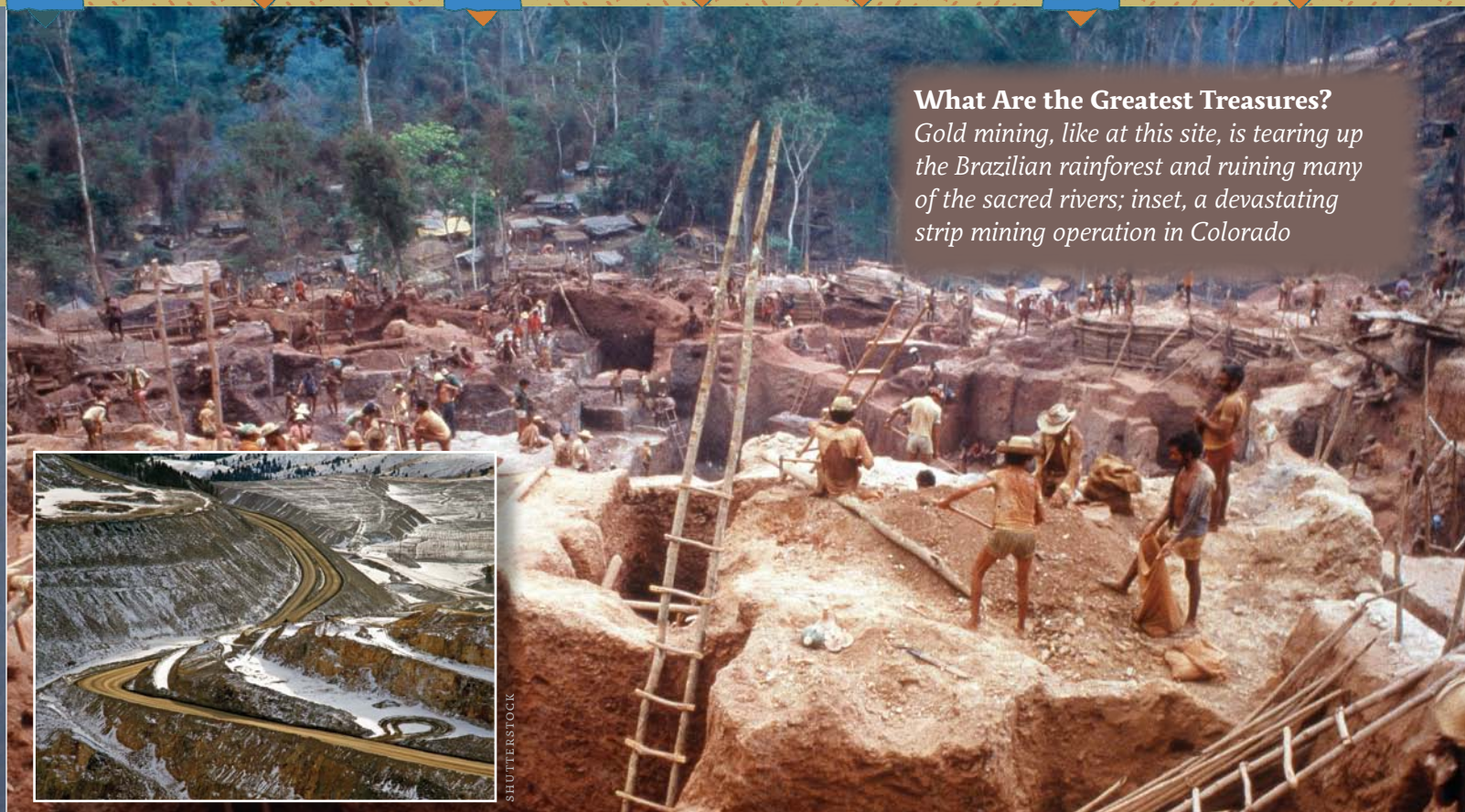
## Having Concern for Others

SWAMI AVDHESHANAND GIRI, JUNA PEETH  
AND ACHARYA SABHA, UTTARAKHAND

**T**he approach that we should take the maximum wealth available to us from nature, be it oil or metals, and that we should maximize our power with nuclear weapons—these contribute to our global problems. Our Hindu dharma has given us certain important values to implement in our day-to-day lives, including being satisfied with whatever we have. Learn to share, learn to give first, and then enjoy. This attitude will bring about harmony in society. Hinduism is a tradition which has always cared for the growth and religious sensitivities of each and every individual—not only cared for but helped them equally to grow individually. Today the absence of this attitude has created agitation and given rise to crime and imbalance in society. The attitude that “I shall grow at the cost of others” is considered improper in the Hindu religion. It is a great sin against ahimsa, the principle of nonviolence, to be insensitive to the rights and demands of others and to afflict pain or hurt on them—not only physically, but by hurting their religious sentiments, their belief systems.



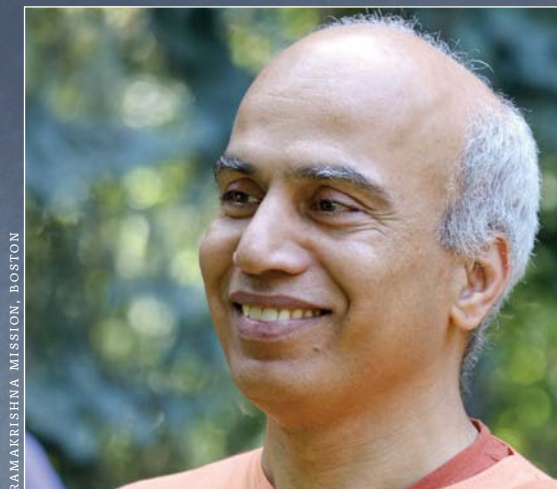
PHAL GIROTA



### What Are the Greatest Treasures?

Gold mining, like at this site, is tearing up the Brazilian rainforest and ruining many of the sacred rivers; inset, a devastating strip mining operation in Colorado

THOMAS KELLY



RAMAKRISHNA MISSION, BOSTON

## Environmental Protection As a Spiritual Practice

SWAMI TYAGANANDA, RAMAKRISHNA MISSION, BOSTON

**H**induism sees the cosmos as pervaded by the Divine. So, taking care of the universe is the same as worshipping the Divine. Environmental protection, preventing environmental degradation, becomes a form of spiritual practice, a form of worship. I think this ideal of oneness provides us the foundation for understanding the close connection we have with the environment. ¶ Ramakrishna Paramahansa, the founder of the order to which I belong, experienced divine immanence in a radical way. In a state of samadhi, he once stood before a patch of green grass and experienced excruciating pain when a person walked over that grass. It's not simply a theoretical concept; in actual practice we really are one. It is one big ocean of matter in which every material object, including our own body, is part. I sometimes call existence the four oceans. At the level of matter, there is one continuous whole. Similarly, at the level of thought, when we speak about the cosmic mind, each mind can be seen as a small wave in this ocean of thoughts and ideas. Even at the level of emotions and feelings, it's one big ocean. And, of course, at the level of spirit it's one big ocean. This oneness is something which mystics have realized, and we also can realize it. That is why I feel that in helping and taking care of the environment we are really taking care of our own self. By hurting the environment we are hurting ourselves.

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injunctions are directly concerned with environmental protection: 1) Be compassionate to all living beings, and 2) Don't cut green trees. Not killing animals is a given.

In the early 1970s, the Chipko movement took to tree hugging to prevent felling of forests in Chamoli district, Uttarakhand. Women from villages recognized that economic and environmental devastation would result from the logging that had been authorized by the Government Department of Forests and staged a direct action campaign to stop it. One need not be part of a spiritual community to uphold environmental protection. There is much that each of us can do, if we observe the traditional virtues with an environmental focus and take to heart the environmental themes in Hindu scripture and the teachings of Mahatma Gandhi.

Though Gandhi was not directly concerned with the environment, and still less with conservation of nature, many of his teachings have environmental implications. In fact, his life and message have been inspirational for generations of environmental writers and campaigners. His concerns about industrialization, about the treatment of animals and the virtues of vegetarianism, about the importance of recycling, about preserving and strengthening local production of goods, all have direct applicability to today's problems. His aphorism, “There's enough in the world for everyone's need but not everybody's greed,” is as vital today as it was a hundred years ago. Indeed, on the streets of Copenhagen during the COP15 UN climate change conference in December 2009, campaigners prominently passed out round stickers displaying the words “Need Not Greed” and the iconic image of Gandhi, simply dressed, walking staff in hand.

Central to applying that aphorism are two ethics: *sanyam* (restraint) and *maryada* (limitation). As Professor Arvind Sharma puts it, “You refrain from drinking or eating too much not because there are laws against doing that, but out of a sense of propriety and decency.” You practice restraint and limitation not because you are forced to, but because it's part of your

lifestyle.

Another key is the principle of *aparigraha*, simplicity, which is closely tied to *santosh*, contentment. When we live every day with a sense of gratitude for our health, while seeking serenity in life, it becomes that much easier to live simply and not identify with what we have or don't have, what our neighbors have that we don't, or what is being advertised as the key to happiness. Gandhi advised, “Live simply, so others may simply live.”

### What Is Being Done?

As awareness of the seriousness of our current environmental problems grows, a number of Hindu organizations have begun taking action to help reduce the environmental impact of their activities and address some of the bigger problems, such as deforestation and climate change.

With tens of thousands of pilgrims visiting Tirumala's Sri Venkateswara Temple daily and about 30,000 of them being fed by the communal kitchen, a lot of energy is required to cook those meals. Prior to 2008, generators powered by diesel fuel were used; but since then, solar-powered cookers have been installed, massively reducing the greenhouse gas emissions. Just a few months ago, Tirumala took action to stop plastic litter pollution, replacing the plastic bags used to distribute prasada with ones made of cloth, paper or jute, and using paper or reusable cups, instead of plastic ones, for serving tea and water.

In Uttarakhand, Swami Chidanand Saraswati has made preservation of the environment a top priority. He has been working to raise public awareness and influence government policy to reduce pollution of the River Ganga (sidebar page 53).

People are becoming more aware of the wide-ranging effects of



## On a Personal Level

MATTHEW MCDERMOTT, SENIOR WRITER FOR  
TREEHUGGER.COM & PLANETGREEN.COM

**W**hile some environmental issues seem beyond the control of the individual, there is still much a person or a family can do. Many lists of things you can do to green your life focus on myriad small steps, such as recycling. But to get an overview, there are three important areas on which to concentrate: what you eat, how you use energy and how you get around.

**1. Your Diet:** The environmental benefits of being vegetarian, particularly when you also eat organically grown produce, are numerous. A vegetarian diet reduces your personal carbon emissions by over one ton per year, compared to someone who eats meat, while a vegan diet reduces it even further.

**2. Your Power:** If your electricity supplier offers an option to use renewable energy, choosing this is a great way to lower your home's environ-

mental impact. Whether you have such an option or not, there are many ways to reduce your power consumption and thus be more Earth friendly: go solar, improve insulation, install timers and motion sensors, air-dry your clothes, use rechargeable batteries, turn off

lights, use on-demand gas water heaters and LED lights, hand tools rather than power tools, etc.

**3. Your Transportation:** Choose the least damaging way of getting from point A to point B, the one with the lowest carbon footprint. Aviation, for example, is hugely energy intensive. Just one long flight a year, say New York to Los Angeles or London, nearly equals in carbon emissions the entire yearly emissions of the average Indian citizen. A train or bus creates a small fraction of the pollution. Choose a car with high fuel efficiency and share the ride with others. For short daily journeys, walking and bicycling are by far best for the environment—and for your health and finances.

**Alternate Energy:** A Gurung worker fixes solar panels, maintaining a positive alternative source of energy for a house in Pulimarang, Nepal

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deforestation: it accelerates erosion in mountain areas, destroys habitat for animals and imperils resources that are essential for people's livelihoods. It contributes to climate change by reducing the ability of the Earth to absorb greenhouse gas emissions and exacerbates the damage done by cyclones and rising sea levels.

Reforestation or afforestation programs can help stop such environmental damage. A number of groups have begun undertaking this work. Soham Baba Mission has begun planting trees around Kolkata and in the Sundarbans. In coastal areas such as these, healthy forests will reduce damage from cyclones and, in the future, from rising sea levels. Adichunchanagiri Math has just completed a program of planting 50 million trees in Karnataka (sidebar, page 45). Groups such as the Pan Himalayan Grassroots Development Foundation are helping local peoples restore their community forests, thereby improving water security, maintaining biodiversity and, ultimately, helping local farmers maintain their livelihoods while ensuring that the environment is also protected. And by absorbing greenhouse gas emissions, forestation can help slow climate change, thereby reducing the melting of glaciers hundreds and thousands of miles away.

### Critical Mass

One hundred fifty years ago, Earth was still an open planet. Human populations and their impact were well within its capacity to absorb any harm caused. Today, with the population of China or India alone equal to that of the entire planet in 1850, human activity has expanded and escalated to the point where we are crashing into inflexible ecological boundaries. Earth is closed. We have reached critical mass; our actions, which used to be limited in impact, now impact the entire planet. Nevertheless, I am growing to believe that our crisis presents an evolutionary opportunity in human consciousness—an opportunity to address lingering inequity, waste and squander, a time where positive change is possible.

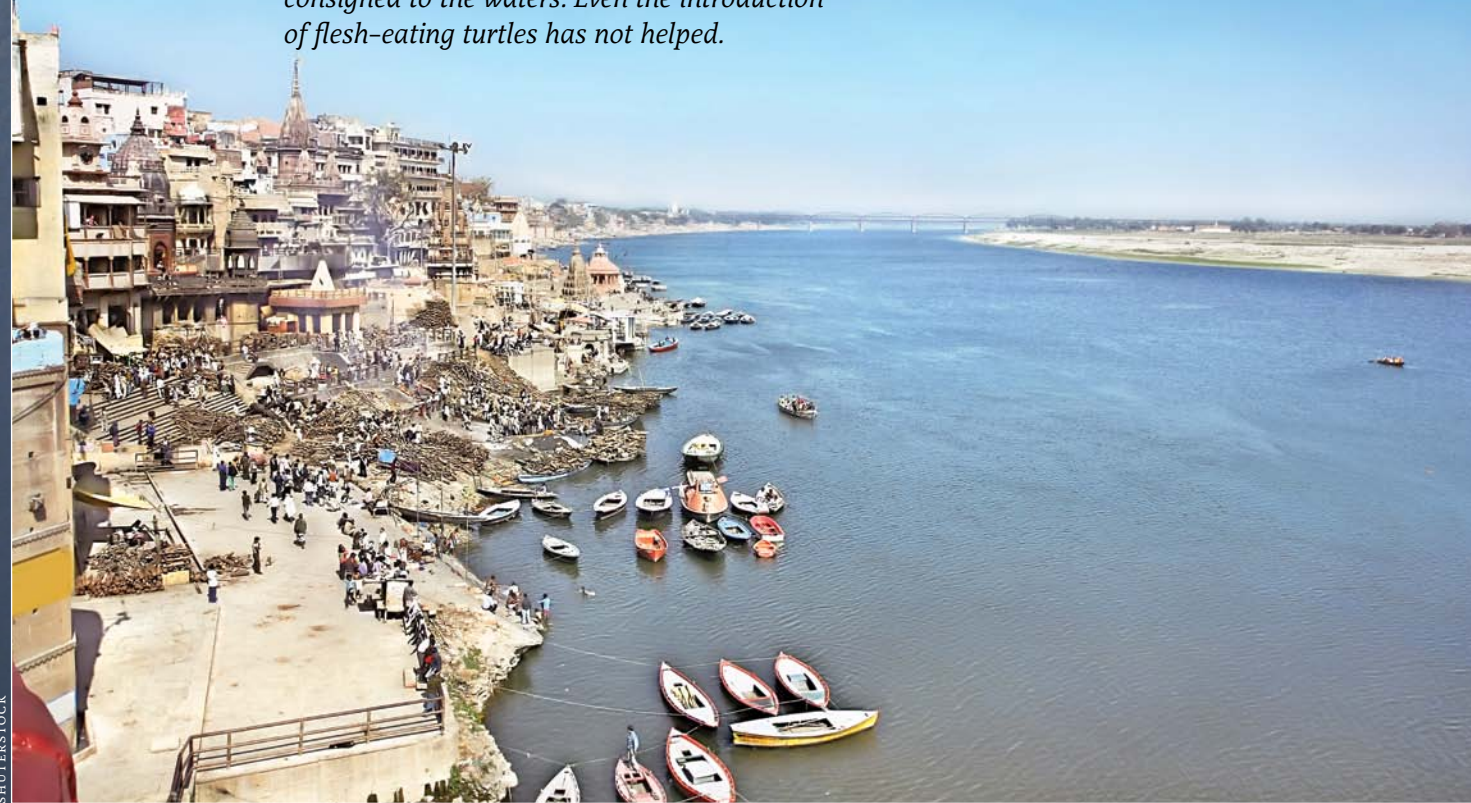
## A Hindu Declaration on Climate Change

**T**he Hindu tradition understands that man is not separate from nature, that we are linked by spiritual, psychological and physical bonds with the elements around us. Knowing that the Divine is present everywhere and in all things, Hindus strive to do no harm. We hold a deep reverence for life and an awareness that the great forces of nature—the earth, the water, the fire, the air and space—as well as all the various orders of life, including plants and trees, forests and animals, are bound to each other within life's cosmic web. ¶ Our beloved Earth, so touchingly looked upon as the Universal Mother, has nurtured mankind through millions of years of growth and evolution. Now centuries of rapacious exploitation of the planet have caught up with us, and a radical change in our relationship with nature is no longer an option. It is a matter of survival. We cannot continue to destroy nature without also destroying ourselves. The dire problems besetting our world—war, disease, poverty and hunger—will all be magnified many fold by the predicted impacts of climate change. ¶ The nations of the world have yet to agree upon a plan to ameliorate man's contribution to this complex change. This is largely due to powerful forces in some nations which oppose any such attempt, challenging the very concept that unnatural climate change is occurring. Hindus everywhere should work toward an international consensus. Humanity's very survival depends upon our capacity to make a major transition of consciousness, equal in significance to earlier transitions from nomadic to agricultural, agricultural to industrial and industrial to technological. We must transit to complementarity in place of competition, convergence in place of conflict, holism in place of hedonism, optimization in place of maximization. We must, in short, move rapidly toward a global consciousness that replaces the present fractured and fragmented consciousness of the human race. ¶ Mahatma Gandhi urged, "You must be the change you wish to see in the world." If alive today, he would call upon Hindus to set the example, to change our lifestyle, to simplify our needs and restrain our desires. As one sixth of the human family, Hindus can have a tremendous impact. We can and should take the lead in Earth-friendly living, personal frugality, lower power consumption, alternative energy, sustainable food production and vegetarianism, as well as in evolving technologies that positively address our shared plight. Hindus recognize that it may be too late to avert drastic climate change. Thus, in the spirit of *vasudhaiva kutumbakam*, "the whole world is one family," Hindus encourage the world to be prepared to respond with compassion to such calamitous challenges as population displacement, food and water shortage, catastrophic weather and rampant disease. ¶ Sanatana Dharma envisions the vastness of God's manifestation and the immense cycles of time in which it is perfectly created, preserved and destroyed, again and again, every dissolution being the preamble to the next creative impulse. Notwithstanding this spiritual reassurance, Hindus still know we must do all that is humanly possible to protect the Earth and her resources for the present as well as future generations.

PRESENTED FOR CONSIDERATION TO THE CONVOCATION OF HINDU SPIRITUAL LEADERS,  
PARLIAMENT OF THE WORLD'S RELIGIONS, MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA, DECEMBER 8, 2009



**River Ganga:** The cremation ghats at Varanasi add substantially to the sacred river's burden, with corpses wrapped in white cloth and consigned to the waters. Even the introduction of flesh-eating turtles has not helped.

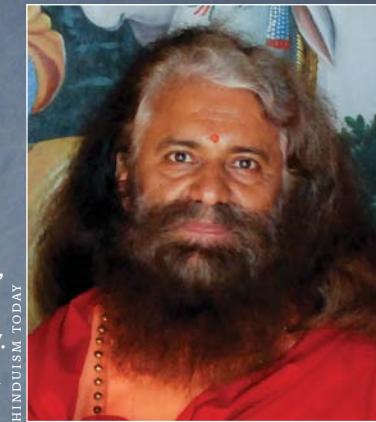


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## Example: Let's Clean up the Ganges!

SWAMI CHIDANAND SARASWATI, PARMARTH NIKETAN, UTTARAKHAND

**T**he Hindu younger people are more receptive to environmental protection, and when the young people are involved, the whole family will be involved. However, their parents think, "Since Ganga washes out sins, why can't it handle this little bit of trash also?" They have to understand that Ganga can wash your sins, but it has a limit when taking care of your trash. What we call holy we can make ugly. That should not happen. The holy program should not become the ugly program. The holy places should not become ugly places. ¶Ganga does not just give spiritual life to people; it gives livelihood. Forty percent of the people in this country live in this basin where Ganga flows. If the water is not here, how will their life be here? If the water is polluted, how will their health not be polluted? It is connected with their health, their livelihoods, for generations to come. ¶Where do we begin? Action is the way. Commitment



HINDUISM TODAY

is the way. Implementation is the way. There should be an A-to-Z plan for Ganga: how the problem started, what the problem is, and how to take care of it. We must take care of it from all venues. ¶There are four kinds of pollution going into Ganga. Number one is the sewage, which is very important to handle. For sewage we are working with the government. But government alone is not enough. You need the people's participation. To get the people's participation you need leaders who can inspire people, who can bring them together to serve for the cause. That can be done by the spiritual leaders, the saints. Bringing the government and spiritual leaders together is being handled very carefully and successfully. ¶Number two is garbage being thrown in the Ganga. People think, "My home is my home, but the street, that's not mine. My farm is mine, but the road is not mine. That's the government's road, the borough's road, or the municipality's road; it's not mine." But that is not correct. It's not just "your home is your home." The street is also yours. "My home, my street. My Ganga, my country." Until we have this kind of relationship with the environment, that kind of awareness will not come. ¶Third is industrial pollution. That is a very challenging job. For that we are talking to industries. Some are nice; some are sometimes not so nice. For those we are going to the courts. We have done a few court cases, and as a result orders are given by the governments, and change is being implemented. ¶The fourth kind of pollution is religious pollution. People go on the banks of Ganga, use their flowers in worship and then throw into the Ganga their flowers and whatever plastic container they brought them in. They think Ganga can take care of it. We are stopping this. In the temples and in the ashrams, so much religious trash comes in the form of flowers. This is wonderful to offer to God but afterwards it has to be taken away. For that we have a flower van. It collects every week all those flowers—going from temple to temple, from ashram to ashram—and takes them to the field where they can make a fertilizer. All these forms of environmental degradation need to be handled simultaneously.

## Insights from the Vedas & Ayurveda

VAMADEVA SHASTRI (DR. DAVID FRAWLEY)

**T**HE UPANISHADS TEACH US THAT EVERYTHING IS BRAHMAN ("SARVAM-khalvidam Brahman") or Satchidananda, Being-Consciousness-Bliss, differing by apparent names and forms only, not by essential nature. This does not mean that God created the world, but that God and the world are one as the manifest and unmanifest aspects of the same ocean of consciousness. All life is not merely interdependent but is one at its core with the Supreme Truth.

The famous Bhumi Sukta, or Hymn to the Earth, of the *Atharva Veda* speaks of the mystical origin of the Earth in the meditations of the rishis: "Which in the beginning dwelled in the waters of the ocean, which the wise seers found by their magic wisdom power, the Earth whose heart is in the supreme ether, covered by truth and immortality—may that Earth grant us light and strength in the highest kingdom" (XII.1.8).

This Earth is meant as a place of worship and as a place to be worshiped, not merely as a playground for us to pursue our own personal gratification. This honoring of the Earth as an altar for inner and outer worship should be the basis of our relationships with the Earth and with the entire world.

This Vedic honoring of the sacred nature of all life is called *yajna*, sometimes translated as "sacrifice," but which really refers to a sacred way of life and action that recognizes the divine presence in all things and strives to live in harmony with it. Our lives should be a ritual in which we strive to pursue a way of right action in harmony with the rhythms of nature and of the spirit through which nature works.

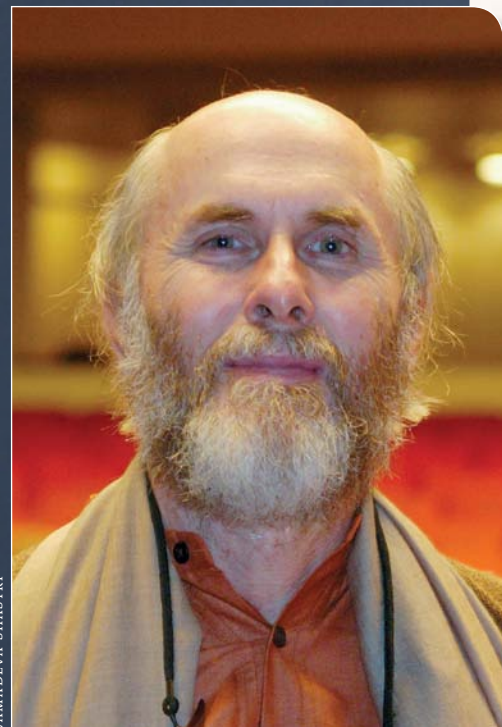
The practice of yoga arose as the inner sacrifice, or *antaryaga*, the offering of

speech, breath and mind into the divine flame of awareness or Agni within our hearts. The yoga asana itself is meant to establish a sacred connection with the Earth. Yoga itself should be a sacred art of communing with all of life.

### Ayurveda

Ayurveda warns of epidemic diseases, both physical and psychological in nature, that can arise through damage to our environment. The *Charaka Samhita* (III.6.23) discusses in detail disease-causing effects of polluted and disturbed air, water, land and seasons as a cause of destruction of entire countries. Twenty-eight factors of damage to air, water and land are listed, of which we can find all occurring in the world today. Besides harmful factors to the outer world, they include perverse and selfish behavior on the part of human beings, their fall from ethical behavior and disregard for spiritual practices, particularly unrighteous conduct by the rulers of a country and, above all, violence and war.

Charaka states that when natural time cycles like the seasons become disrupted, the situation becomes most dangerous. Yet he also states that such collective problems and diseases can be avoided and countered by health practices like pancha karma, by a sattvic life and the practices of yoga and meditation. Clearly our disruption of the environment has consequences both of a material and spiritual nature, though these may take some more decades to fully manifest, as nature works on a slower time cycle than human beings. We must reconnect ourselves with universal peace and once more come to honor the Earth and nature in order to solve this dire situation.



VAMADEVA SHASTRI





# The Power of Vedanta

How my father's profound grasp of philosophy sustained a family of enlightened Hindus and prepared each of us to be a global citizen

BY ANITA RAINA THAPAN

**A** CHILD OF TWO CIVILIZATIONS—INDIAN and French—I am in a position to appreciate the power of the Hindu way of life when it is backed by knowledge and right understanding.

My father, a British Indian Army officer, met my mother, the daughter of a French colonial civil servant, in Saigon at the end of WWII. Theirs would be a lifelong relationship of devotion, commitment and struggle. Neither family was happy when the young couple announced their intention to marry. Political conditions in India, the Far East and France in the late 1940s also delayed matters considerably; but finally, after four long years of waiting, they were married in India in 1949.

## My Mother Becomes a Hindu

My father, a Kashmiri pandit, was deeply rooted in Hinduism. He had a sound understanding of the *Bhagavad Gita* and also of our great epic literature. He had made it clear to my mother that since they would always live in India, the family would have to be Hindu and my mother would have to adopt the ways of the Indian family. As a first step, before the wedding, a shuddhi ceremony was performed for my Catholic mother. She was then declared a Hindu and, thereafter, married by Arya Samaj rites.

Converting to Hinduism was not difficult for my mother. The Catholicism that she had been exposed to by the French nuns in Saigon created a great distaste in her heart. The French community in the city was small; when any particular member was absent from Sunday service at the cathedral, it was noticed. Whenever my French grandmother abstained from Sunday service because of an ailing child, my mother, being the eldest of her siblings, would have to do penance for her mother the following day. She never understood the logic of the practice, finding it cruel and unjust; and she grew up disliking the church. In contrast, Hindu philosophy, as explained to her by my father, appeared logical, wise and humane. So she set out to adapt to her new life with single-minded devotion and soon became the beloved of the Kashmiri family.

Understanding Hindu philosophy was one thing, but the lived faith in India seemed quite different. As my mother discovered, India, too, had its share of blind superstition, caste injunctions and innumerable rituals which did not always make sense. However, my father's wisdom based on the *Gita* was an anchor which provided stability. It was the sane voice of a reasoned and lived faith. It gave her the strength to live through many trying times.



HINDUISM TODAY

## The Gita's Influence on My Childhood

As a young child, I was sent as a boarder to a convent because missionary schools in India were, at that time, considered to be the best in terms of education and discipline. Besides, my father was posted in small cantonments where schooling was not always great. The German Catholic nuns in my school were horrified to hear that my Catholic mother had two children who had never been baptized. That, I was informed, was a great sin, and the nuns set about praying daily for the soul of my mother. So, as a child, I agonized about what was right and what was wrong until my father took me out of the convent! All my misgivings were slowly put to rest by his firm and convincing reasoning.

The philosophy of the *Bhagavad Gita* left its imprint on me through his attitude and advice at crucial moments of my childhood.

I found that setbacks which the world considered as "failures" were not considered so by my father if I had worked and done my best. They were celebrated for the sincerity of intention and effort, which he emphasized, would, in the long run, bear fruit. At the same time, when I met with well-deserved failures, instead of being punished, my father would patiently explain that playfulness at the wrong time and lack of focus could only lead to such pathetic results. He would brush aside my tears assuring me that no successful individual had reached her goal without failure, that I must learn from such sorry experiences and ensure they never happened again. Then they would have served a worthy purpose.

"Conversion to Christianity in Manila slowed down as the Bal Vihars took effect."

## I Discover Chinmaya Mission

It was only when I became a mother myself that I truly began to appreciate the vital need of passing to the young generation a thorough understanding of Hindu philosophy, symbolism and ritual.

This deep aspiration led me to enroll in the university for a second Master's degree—in ancient Indian history. It was at that time, too, that Swami Chinmayananda came into my life. This happened a few years after my father's premature death.

A dear family friend, inspired by Swami Chinmayananda, started Chinmaya Bal Vihar classes in her home. (She later took sannyas and became Swamini Gurupriyanand.) Delighted at the classes, I promptly enrolled my sons, aged four and seven. For the next three years, Sunday mornings became the highlight of the week. The children excelled in devotional singing, acting out stories from the scriptures, chanting the *Gita* and understanding the wisdom of



Hindu culture through the medium of story.

We had the opportunity to meet Swami Chinmayananda several times. We visited the ashram in Sidhbar, Himachal Pradesh, to attend camps, and the children soaked in the values and discipline of ashram life.

## Education Deters Conversion

After three years, in 1991, we moved to Manila, Philippines, where I saw the vital role played by the Bal Vihar in the local Sindhi community. Since the 1970s, the Sindhi community in Southeast Asia had become increasingly concerned by the younger generation's growing susceptibility to the "Born Again" Christians. Several conversions had taken place. At the time, the religious life of the community revolved around rituals, with no understanding of their significance. There was no knowledge of Hindu philosophy, and the local temple offered no spiritual guidance.

It was in the 1980s that the Chinmaya Mission found its way to this region and started working to instill pride in Hindu religion and tradition. Teaching that the *Bhagavad Gita* is the Hindu equivalent to the *Bible* or the *Koran*, the Chinmaya Bal Vihar helps the youth maintain their Hindu identity while growing up in a Christian or Muslim country. Visiting swamis of the Mission reinforce this pride and identity, and trips to pilgrimage sites and ashrams in India create bonds with their land of origin.

From my extensive interviews with the Sindhi Christian groups and missionaries in charge of them, as also from the sevikas conducting Chinmaya Mission Bal Vihar classes, it became apparent that conversion to Christianity seemed to have slowed down in the

1990s as the effects of the Chinmaya Bal Vihars began to be felt.

In today's age of scientific enquiry, Vedanta, as expounded by Swami Chinmayananda, gives young people a whole new perspective on life. It challenges the intellect, inspires devotion and selfless service and evokes great reverence and awe for the depth and scope of Hindu thought. Above all, it offers the vision of unity, which is the greatest need of the world today.

Swami Chinmayananda set in motion a great Hindu renaissance reaching Hindus across the world. His successor, Swami Tejomananda, has knitted these different communities into one large family. Thanks to these great masters, I, like numerous others, have found my path. They have given me clarity, conviction and direction. They have touched my mother's heart, bringing her solace in the evening of her life after the loss of her husband and son. Above all, they have anchored my children in an enlightened Hinduism even as they have blossomed into global citizens, at ease in any culture and society.

Anita Raina Thapan's e-mail is [phoenix4me@gmail.com](mailto:phoenix4me@gmail.com)

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**Chinmaya Mission Delhi:** Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami (center) visiting the Delhi Mission in April, 2010. (left to right) Mr. Miglani (in charge of books), Anita Raina Thapan, Mrs. Parveen Bahl (president, Chinmaya Mission Delhi), Swami Chidrupananda (Acharya, Noida center), Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami, Swamini Gurupriyananda (Acharya, Chinmaya Ranjan Centre, Delhi), and two of Bodhinatha's monks, Acharya Arumugaswami and Sadhaka Nandinatha.



RAJIV MALIK





## THEOLOGY

# All Religions Are Not the Same

Let us be very clear and forthright about our heritage: Hinduism has a profound depth and unique features not available in other faiths

BY SWAMI NIKHILANAND

ONE GOAL WE OFTEN HEAR VOICED BY the Hindu community in America is to preserve the authenticity of the teachings of Hinduism and pass that heritage on to future generations. There is a statement many of us make which undermines these efforts. We often say, "All religions are the same." Why do we say it? Sometimes we don't want to offend anyone. This is a safe, politically correct, fallback position. Sometimes, not knowing the intricacies of Hinduism, we fail to recognize its uniqueness and greatness. If Hinduism were the same as all other religions, then why would we care if our children convert to other religions? Why would we organize conferences to preserve our essential teachings and develop better ways of teaching them to our kids? If Hinduism were the same as all other religions, then why would I, who was not raised Hindu, have chosen Hinduism over other religions?

It is true that there cannot be two Gods. There cannot be a separate Hindu God, a separate Christian God, a separate Muslim God, a separate Jewish God, etc. Our *Vedas* state, "*Ekamevadvitiyam brahm nehananasti kinchan*," "God is one and absolute. There can be no other." So whoever is worshipping God, anywhere in this universe, is worshipping the same God. And all theistic religions agree on certain general characteristics of God. God is perfection, absolute divinity, omnipresent, all-knowing, all powerful, blissful, etc. This is the extent of the description available in other religions, but not in Hinduism. The Sanskrit scriptures of Hinduism reveal the knowledge of God on a much deeper level. This is both what makes Hinduism great and also what makes it more challenging to comprehend.

Some Hindus complain that it is so easy for the members of other religions to summarize the teachings of their religion. It is easy to summarize general and superficial knowledge. But the depth, scope and detail of Hinduism require more skill and training to understand, distill and communicate to others. Clearly it is important to have a qualified teacher. Anyone can teach finger-painting, but it takes someone with a PhD to teach nuclear physics. Hinduism must be learned from someone with not only theoretical understanding, but with practical experience of God.

The word *God* is a general term. It is vague and non-specific, like the word *fruit*. Fruit is abstract, because fruit does not exist as such. Bananas exist; apples exist; mangoes exist. If I ask you to describe what fruit looks like, you cannot, because fruit is a general term. You could only describe the appearance of a mango or an apple—a specific fruit. Similarly, the description of God in other religions is non-specific and general. What does God look like? You cannot tell me, because God is just an abstract term. However, in Hinduism



we have the specific description of God's form and personal names. He is Krishna, He is Ram, He is Vishnu, He is Siva, She is Durga, etc. We know what He looks like, and we know what His Divine personality is like.

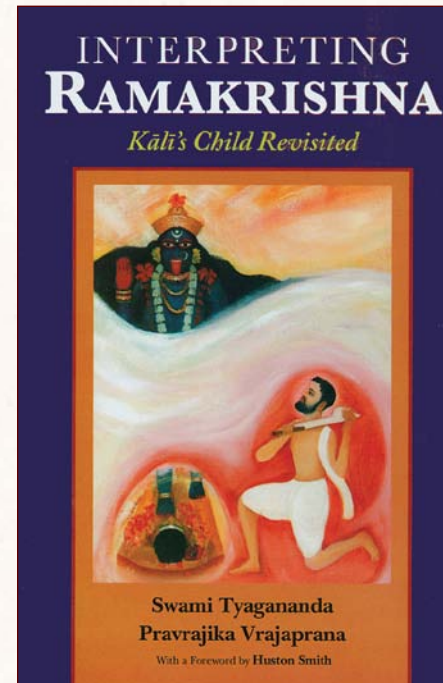
Supreme God has uncountable Divine powers. When most of them are dormant or inactive, then God is formless and is referred to by the term *Brahman*. When more of His powers are active, God has form, and is referred to by the term *Paramatma*. This is almighty God, Whose three main forms are Vishnu, Shiv and Durga. Krishna says in the *Gita*, "*Ye yatha mam prapadyante tanstathaiva bhajamyaham*." In other words, "I come to you in whatever form you worship Me." Hinduism not only incorporates the concepts of God of other religions but also reconciles the apparent differences in the

various descriptions, all the while providing an unmatched depth and elegance in the description of God.

Hinduism is also unique in saying that God can be experienced, and, in fact, that is the ultimate goal of a soul. This was one of the most compelling factors for me in my decision to adopt Hinduism. Not only does Hinduism answer all of my intellectual questions, but it clearly states that you can meet God in person. Now who wouldn't want to do that? However, if you don't have the full description of God, then how will you find Him? It would be like someone coming from India and landing at JFK in New York and asking the people he sees, "Have you seen my friend? Where is my friend? I want to meet him." They would ask, "What does your friend look like? Do you have a picture of him? What is his name? Where does he live?" The man answers that he only knows that his friend moved to America 20 years ago, but he does not remember what he looks like, nor does he have a picture of him. People will think him insane because he may search all over America for his whole life and never have any chance of finding his friend. Similarly, without a proper description of God, how could we hope to find Him? Hinduism provides such a detailed description of God, which is like providing the photograph and the address of the man's friend. Now all the man has to do is follow the path to reach his friend. This path, known as the path of God realization, is also described in Hinduism.

There are many more such points which illustrate the greatness of Hinduism. So remember, although there are similarities between Hinduism and the other religions of the world, and as Hindus we respect all religions, nonetheless, there are features of Hinduism which are not found in other religions and which make Hinduism great.

SWAMI NIKHILANAND, a disciple of Jagadguru Shree Kripalujii Maharaj, adopted Hinduism as a young man, and received the order of sannyas in the raganuga tradition of Vrindaban, India.



## BOOK REVIEWS

# Interpreting Ramakrishna

BY DR. KUSUMITA PEDERSEN, NEW YORK

INTERPRETING RAMAKRISHNA: KALI'S *Child Revisited* by Swami Tyagananda and Pravrajika Vrajaprana is an account of Jeffrey Kripal's 1995 book *Kali's Child: The Mystical and the Erotic in the Life of Ramakrishna* and the storm of controversy it raised. Drawing on the ideas of psychoanalysis, *Kali's Child* seeks to show that Ramakrishna was a conflicted homosexual who had been sexually abused as a child and as an adult also had traumatic sexual encounters. It views Ramakrishna's samadhi as a kind of defense mechanism and finds sexual meanings in many of his visions, words and actions.

Kripal states that "Ramakrishna's mystical experiences were constituted by mystico-erotic energies that he neither fully accepted nor understood," and his interpretation of Ramakrishna's "secret" serves as a case study that Kripal sees as confirming his strongly held views on the continuity of mystical experience and sexuality. It should be added that any assessment of Jeffrey Kripal's thinking on this broad topic cannot be based only on *Kali's Child*, his first book, but must take into account his entire body of work, which is now extensive (and most of which does not concern Ramakrishna).

*Interpreting Ramakrishna* is the result of more than ten years of research and analysis by two senior monastics of the Ramakrishna Order. The book is written with an exemplary combination of civility, deep feeling and concern for accuracy. It is painstakingly thorough as well as probing and reflective. *Interpreting Ramakrishna* is an indispensable work for anyone concerned with the *Kali's Child* debate and how Ramakrishna is understood, and is of interest for the study of mysticism more generally. Also, it should take a significant place in the record of how India and the West have understood one another—or failed to do so.

It begins with a history of Ramakrishna scholarship from the earliest source texts to the present and continues with an initial overall critique of *Kali's Child* and its author's approach. This is followed by a summary of reviews of *Kali's Child* and the debate following its publication. Next a chapter is devoted to three central themes in this cross-cultural interpretation: the relation of mysticism and sexuality; the symbolism of the *linga* and *yoni*; and allegations that Ramakrishna disliked and feared women (here the restoration of the voices of women who knew Ramakrishna well, passed over in *Kali's Child*, is especially welcome). The nature of Tantra and Vedanta, and their relation, are also addressed.

Another chapter describes in detail problems of documentation in *Kali's Child*. *Interpreting Ramakrishna* deals throughout with issues of mis-translations, "spun" translations and paraphrases, cultural and religious mistakes, factual errors and the tactic of building an argument by introducing a point

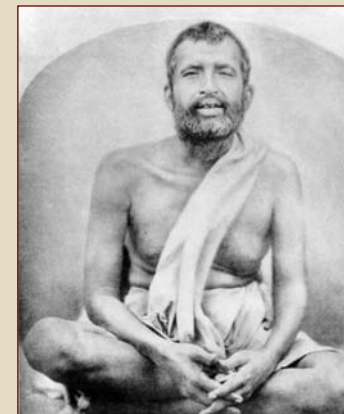
as speculation and later repeating it as fact. When questions of translation or construal are examined, the original Bengali passage, the authors' translation and Kripal's translation are all given. The book concludes with a chapter on the future of Ramakrishna studies, commenting on the ways any interpretation is affected by worldview, identity and motivation and expressing hopes for dialogue and the emergence of "postwesternism" (a phrase coined by Richard King).

At a book launch organized this past October by the Dharma Academy of North America (DANAM) at the Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion, the scholars who spoke praised the meticulous scholarship, substance and balance of *Interpreting Ramakrishna* and also asked that the next step be taken, beyond critique. They called for ongoing constructive thought on Ramakrishna by "insiders" in vigorous exchange with "outsiders," showing why Ramakrishna is important in the twenty-first century. A final thought from this reviewer: the time has come for an entirely new critical and fully annotated translation of the *Sri-Sri-Ramakrishna-Kathamata*, the key primary source on Ramakrishna (the record of his sayings and events in the final years of his life by Mahendranath Gupta, known as "M"). It will be much needed in the next phase of Ramakrishna studies, to which *Interpreting Ramakrishna* has already made a most important contribution.

INTERPRETING RAMAKRISHNA: KALI'S CHILD REVISITED, BY SWAMI TYAGANANDA AND PRAVRAJIKHA VRAJAPRANA, JULY 2010, MOTILAL BANARSIDASS, DELHI, 410 PAGES. [WWW.INTERPRETINGRAMAKRISHNA.COM](http://WWW.INTERPRETINGRAMAKRISHNA.COM)

KUSUMITA P. PEDERSEN, PHD, IS PROFESSOR OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES AT ST. FRANCIS COLLEGE, NEW YORK

## Ramakrishna—An Undying Spiritual Force



Paramahansa Sri Ramakrishna (1836—1886) was one of the great saints and mystics of recent Hinduism, a champion and exemplar of monistic theism. He was both a great bhaktar, a fervent devotee of Mother Kali and a staunch monist who taught oneness and the pursuit of nirvikalpa samadhi, realization of the Absolute. He was guru to the great Swami Vivekananda (1863—1902), who internationalized Hindu thought and philosophy.

The well-known historian, Arnold Toynbee, wrote, "Religion is not just a matter of study, it is something that has to be experienced and to be lived, and this is the field in which Sri Ramakrishna manifested his uniqueness. His religious activity and experience were, in fact, comprehensive to a degree that had perhaps never before

been attained by any other religious genius, in India or elsewhere."

The spiritual power that Sri Ramakrishna passed on to his disciples has lived on in the hearts of millions of Hindus through the Ramakrishna Mission, its swamis and institutions worldwide—a veritable wellspring for the Hindu Renaissance.





SATSANG

# Come, Hear the Wisdom of Mataji Vanamali

When a wandering sage visits, spiritual insight showers on the community

INTERVIEW BY VATSALA SPERLING, VERMONT, US

The hidden caves of the Himalayas have long been home to great souls in search of the Supreme Reality. From time to time, renunciates have descended from the majestic mountains and traveled to the plains of India, from one village to the next, on foot, spreading spiritual insight. Such wandering monks, called *parivrajaka*, are a time-honored tradition in India. Recently, Mataji Vanamali, a renunciate from Vanamali Ashram, Rishikesh, India, happened to pass through my city of Rochester, Vermont.

I had the unique honor of hosting this *parivrajaka* in my humble home. The local book-publishing company, Inner Traditions, arranged for Rochester's Hindu community to have Mataji's darshan. As the *sadhvi* generously shared her insight and wisdom, I thought other readers of HINDUISM TODAY would enjoy her wise words, excerpted below.

## Generations, Honoring the Elders and the Stages of Life

The role of elders in society, and their care, is becoming a problem in India, just like it is in America. But in our Hindu culture we have a system in place for that. Our social order was established by wise people, with a true understanding of the human psyche and our needs. They devised the three ashramas, the stages of life. In the first, *brahmacharya ashrama*, one should pursue education, self-development and the skills necessary for a fruitful and successful adult life. The next, *grihastha ashrama*, was meant for establishing oneself, getting married and raising a family while performing dharma (duty), earning artha (money) and enjoying kama (pleasure). At the final stage, *vanaprastha ashrama*, after many fulfilling years, the couple is encouraged to dwell on spiritual matters and aim for moksha (liberation). Even today, in India, there are many ashramas that welcome old couples and give them opportunity for spiritual growth.

However, instead of following the prescription given to us by our wise ancestors, many elder parents tend to cling to power, money

and control over the next generation. They do not want to let go. They do not volunteer to back off and let the children take charge. They blame their children for being ungrateful and heartless, having forgotten all sacrifices they made. In our demanding modern times, forcing young and harried couples into the role of care-providers for aging, ill or dependant parents causes a great deal of tension and hardship on everyone involved.

If the parents are truly evolved people, they will gladly loosen their hold. Parents must grow up and renounce the world and allow their children to take charge. The old parents should voluntarily pursue spiritual life and take renunciation from the familial involvement.

## Arranged Marriages, Love and Divorce

All marriages have the same goals. In the West, the way people marry impresses on the couple the idea that since they have created their own marriage, they also have the freedom to destroy it, to get a divorce anytime, without any consideration for family, children or the society. But, quite on the contrary, in making the union themselves they have accrued a greater responsibility, becoming accountable for its success and continuation.

In the process of assisted marriage, the couple has the support of their family and society. They feel more secure. Their marriage survives a lifetime and even beyond. Since it is not based exclusively on physical attraction, it is much more stable. Answerable to the community, they are not quick to divorce.

But many Hindus begin to think that our traditional way of securing a marriage is a bore! Those are increasingly self-involved people. Parents can stop this trend by giving their children firm Hindu values, educating them about how marriage is more than just a coming together of two bodies. Marriage involves two souls, two families, two lineages, and it has to be honored. It should be seen as a way to spiritual self-fulfillment and not just a quick way to fulfill physical



needs and wants. My suggestion is: take marriage seriously; work honestly and hard to be true to your marriage vows.

## The Value of Samskaras

I cannot stress enough the value of good *samskaras* and ideas that we put into the children. In early childhood they are learning from example, even when they don't seem to be listening.

Unfortunately, if both parents are working, they are compelled to send their all-too-young children to day-care or pay baby sitters. Kids spend most of their time in front of the TV. This seemingly innocuous practice messes up their growing neural network because of the fast pace of editing. Such fast-moving and loud images cause children to go numb to surroundings, lose the ability to imagine and become unable to sustain focus and mental concentration for more than a few minutes. With hours of "sedentary *samadhi*" in front of the TV, children begin to suffer from many issues for which they are dragged to doctors. Where is parenting in this lifestyle?

Mothers should take a few years off work until the kids are ready for school. The mother must spend as much time as possible with the kids, giving them a healthy start, love and support for their all-round growth and development. She can always return to the workforce once the kids have grown.

Parents have to understand that advice given just in words has no value. For a child, it's all about examples, events and actions. The *samskaras* prescribed by our religion have a deep effect, planting the seeds of positive thinking in children. At home, parents can set positive examples, such as speaking the truth, not stealing, not lying, not cheating, refraining from foul and abusive language, refusing to engage in abusive and manipulative behavior and staying loyal to their family.

## On the Importance of Brahmacharya for the Youth

Keeping the mind pure and free is the very first objective of *brahmacharya*. *Brahmacharya* is not just physical, but spiritual. A true *brahmachari* does not fill his mind with lustful thoughts.

Hinduism recognizes that sex is a necessary and normal part of life. But sex is problematic when it becomes an obsession, as the media has it. Complete *brahmacharya* for our youth today—in mind and body—is practically impossible because the entire atmosphere is charged with messages of lust and greed.

Our Hindu religion does not prescribe lifetime celibacy for everyone. It advocates marriage for the vast majority of people as young adults, so that their sexual energy can be channeled and focused into the spouse and is not running wild. If a young person wants to commit to lifetime *brahmacharya* for spiritual reasons, he must know that it is a difficult path to take, and distractions are many.

## Being a Proud Hindu Anywhere

The word *Hindu* is of fairly recent use, coined by the West to define what in India has always been the one spiritual law. You will know a Hindu, a follower of Sanatana Dharma, by his behavior, beliefs and conduct. Those who prefer the term *Vedic* should not do so out of an inferiority complex or a sense of shame about being a Hindu. If people in this situation knew even a little about the great depth, beauty and meaning of Sanatana Dharma, they would become proud to call themselves Hindus.



ALL PHOTOS: VATSALA SPERLING

Removed from their country, struggling to keep their faith alive in a foreign land, managing busy lives and careers, Hindus abroad have found that they must stick to some form of their culture, tradition and religion. Regrettably, they rarely find the time to go deep into the roots, to understand the true significance of their rituals and celebrations.

To these children of Sanatana Dharma, I say, go to your roots, read books on Hinduism, read the works of great scholars and spiritual teachers, understand the amazingly esoteric meaning of every single symbol, gesture, word, custom and ritual of Hinduism. If your parents don't know, educate them. You are the intelligent new guardians of the faith; you must learn to respect and admire your great culture and religion—there is no faith as deep or as great as the Sanatana Dharma, the original mother of all religions and spiritual philosophies.

Hindus outside India are in a unique situation. Children in Western schools are teased about having a bindi, about their elephant God, about their beautiful and unabashedly feminine Goddesses, and about stone statues with many hands and faces. We must educate these children starting with the ABCs of Hindu religion. These children are often growing up with Christmas trees instead of ghee lamps and firecrackers on Deepavali day. They feel ashamed to be known as Hindus and begin drifting away. The kids need information and answers, and that is the parents' responsibility.

## Advice for All Hindus

My message is: follow the humble example of Hanuman, who embodies shakti (power) and bhakti (devotion). Without bhakti, pure shakti gives rise to arrogance. But coupled with bhakti, it gives direction and purpose to life and aids in spiritual evolution. By combining bhakti and shakti, you will find a positive expression and purpose, giving you peace of mind.

Vatsala Sperling, PhD (below right), is a Clinical Microbiologist and a Homeopath, author of several books for children and co-author with her husband of For Seven Lifetimes. She lives in Vermont with her husband and their son, Mahar. E-mail: [vs@innertraditions.com](mailto:vs@innertraditions.com)







## Guyana's Hindus Face Gay Quandry

When a constitutional amendment proposed to end discrimination against homosexuals, Guyanese Hindus asked themselves, "Where do we stand?"

BY VIDYARATHA KISSOON  
GEORGETOWN, GUYANA

IF MODERN SCIENCE IS RIGHT—AND SOMETIMES IT IS—there are more than 50 million homosexual and bisexual people in India, 15 million in the US and 30,000 in Guyana. The role, aspirations and rights of this large segment of society (and, in the minds of some, their wrongs) is a hot topic throughout this tropical nation. Guyanese Hindus, nearly one third of the population, are pondering: is there a unifying Hindu view on homosexuality?

The beautiful republic of Guyana, nestled on the lush northeastern coast of South America, is a young nation solidifying its identity. After being ruled by the Dutch, the Spanish and finally the British, the country achieved independence in 1966, becoming the only South American state in the Commonwealth.

Guyana's ethnic heritage is varied—mostly Indian and African, but also Native American, European and Chinese. It is a nation of many peoples and traditions finding their way toward harmony, and its laws reflect

this process. Revisions and amendments to the constitution are relatively common.

In January, 2001, the Congress of Guyana voted to pass a constitutional amendment that would forbid discrimination based on sexual orientation. However, this amendment never became law; the president, Bharrat Jagdeo (a Hindu), succumbed to intense pressure and did not sign it. This left in place legislation which is a legacy of the British colonial period—legislation which criminalizes consensual same-sex activity and cross-dressing. The United Kingdom

itself repealed such legislation in 1967, but most former colonies retained these Victorian laws. It was only in 2009, for instance, that India's Supreme Court ruled that its anti-gay laws were unconstitutional.

Guyana's proposed 2001 constitutional amendment would not have repealed Guyana's laws that make homosexual activity a felony. But it would have, for example, protected an employee from being fired simply because he or she is homosexual. Despite its modest goal, the anti-discrimination amendment has been languishing for a decade.

### Opposition and Another Chance

The debate is complicated by the country's many cultures and religions and their varied views on morality and justice. Who was adamantly opposed to ending discrimination in Guyana? Large groups are not homogeneous, of course. But those against the amendment

**We belong:** Hindu activists meet at the Organization of American States, in a search for equality

used mostly religious arguments; therefore, the numbers of the country's faithful play a decisive role. Guyana's population is 57% Christian (17% Pentecostal, 8% Roman Catholic, 7% Anglican, 25% other denominations), 28% Hindu and 9% Sunni Muslim.

Most Protestants opposed the constitutional change, while the Catholic Church officially supported it. Muslim groups were mostly either silent or against the proposal. Hindus remained largely neutral or undecided.

Several religious organizations, mostly of Abrahamic faiths, took a dual stance. While admitting that people have diverse sexual orientations, they expressed concern that the anti-discrimination amendment would eventually lead to the legalization of same-sex marriage, a prospect they abhor. Supporters of the amendment tried to assuage those fears, pointing out that the proposed law preserves the constitutional definition of marriage and family laws. The amendment did include a provision to recognize a common-law relationship, a step below marriage, for both heterosexual and homosexual couples.

Hindu institutions were almost absent from the 2001 debate, except for a joint statement issued by a few organizations—the Guyana Sanatan Dharma Maha Sabha, Guyana Maha Kali Organisation, Gandhi Youth Bhavan and the Guyana Sevashram Sangh—stating that "sexual intercourse, an image of God's own power of creation, should be practiced only within the context of marriage between members of the opposite sex." It said nothing about legal discrimination.

Individual Hindus made more pertinent statements. Mr. Vidyanand Persaud, the representative for Hindu organizations on the Constitution Reform Commission, supported the motion, reminding others that

"Guyana's international treaty obligations encompassing civil and political rights enjoin the government not to discriminate on the grounds of sexual orientation."

A second opportunity to pass the law came in May, 2003, when the constitution was undergoing other reforms. The amendment bill reached the Parliament, but there was no vote; the National Assembly deferred the discussion to a constitutional committee, effectively placing it in a legal limbo.

### National Pride

In truth, more was at play than just the rights of a class of people. National pride became a complicating issue when some people started saying that acceptance of homosexuality was a Western imposition on Guyana. Just last year, in 2010, this idea was summarized by Cabinet spokesperson and head of the Presidential Secretariat Dr. Roger Luncheon: the "government is unlikely to tamper with legislating homosexual activity and cross-dressing. For these issues to be addressed, the government must be convinced that it would be the desire of the people of Guyana and not an agenda being foisted on society by the developed world."

Also in 2010, Guyana participated in the United Nations' Periodic Review of Human Rights, which resulted in recommendations that the government repeal all laws which criminalize consensual same-sex activity. Former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, speaking in November, 2010, said that Guyana's "discriminatory laws and prevailing homophobic practices prevent gay men from accessing the health services" and called for the repeal of those laws. But as of January, 2011, those colonial-era discriminatory laws remain still in full force.

### Hindu Perspectives

Guyana is a religiously plural and tolerant country. Freedom of worship is a constitutional right, and each of the main groups has its national holiday: Christmas, Diwali and the last day of Ramadan.







Hindu organizations are strong and numerous, some of them dating back to the early 20th century: Arya Samaj, Guyana Sevashram Sangh (a branch of the Bharat Sevashram Sangh), Sathya Sai Baba association, Guyana Hindu Dharmic Sabha, Guyana Maha Kali Organisation, Guyana Pandits' Council, Guyana Sanatan Dharma Maha Sabha and the Gandhi Youth Bhavan. Beautiful mandirs adorn cities and villages, serving as centers for worship and *seva*, selfless service. Hindu festivals are widely celebrated.

But community debate has uncovered a simple truth: there is no unified policy in Hinduism about homosexuality. In general, the matter is ruled by common sense, wisdom and tradition. But tradition can be a fluid concept, widely dependent on regional practices and collective memory; it shifts from generation to generation. One example is the strong influence of prudish British thought on Hindu morals in the last few centuries (see sidebar below).

"Indian culture has always had multiple expressions of gender identity and sexual orientation," says Pandit Deodat Tillack, priest at the Shri Samayapuram Mariamma Temple. "The major festivals around Lord Aravan and the worship of Bahucharia Mata, called Murgi Mata in Guyana, reflect these views," he claims. The festivals to Lord Aravan, are a favorite of the third-sex *hijra* in India, who attend en masse; Lord Krishna is believed to have assumed the form of Mohini to marry Aravan as a reward for his dedication. Bahucharia Mata is a patron Goddess of the *hijra* community.

Pandit Tillack's views are echoed by many in Guyana. His colleague Pandit Rajin Bal-



VIDYARATHA KISSOON



VIDYARATHA KISSOON



COURTESY PANDIT BALGOBIND



COURTESY PANDIT TILLACK

**Pandits, priests and sevaks:** (clockwise from top right) Amar Ramessar, president of the Yuva Shakti Sangh; Pandit Deodat Tillack, priest at the Shri Samayapuram Mariamma Temple; Pandit Rajin Balgobind of the Hindu Society of Berbice; Keeran Persaud, president of the Cummings Lodge Industry Hindu Society

normal sex is not right. Since homosexual sexual intercourse does not bring forth children it should not be permitted." Pandit Dhane-sar was not able to provide a reference explaining where in the *Vedas* one could find that dictum; he explained that a pandit's training is largely oral, often bypassing written sources.

The Inter-Religious Organisation, an interfaith body that represents some of Guyana's religious organizations, spoke against the anti-discrimination law. It officially supported the view that acceptance of homosexuality is a Western imposition on Guyana. But Swami Aksharananda, one of its co-chairpersons, vehemently disagreed. Swami—a founder of the Hindu Swayam-sevak Sangh in Guyana, the principal of the Saraswati Vidya Niketan and a Ph.D. in Hindu Studies from the University of Madison, Wisconsin—wrote an energetic rebuke: "We have to be concerned about what is glibly and uncritically invoked to be the position of scriptures on homosexuality. There is hardly any consensus here. While it is true that some religious books consider homosexuality as an abomination, Hinduism, for example, offers a much more nuanced and sophisticated perspective on the matter. Hinduism admits a wide range of sexual orientation

gobind feels that non-heterosexuals, who often question why they were born that way, should recognize that their sexual orientation is part of who they are. "Hindu scriptures do not discriminate against people; we are to be respected as our own decision makers. Everyone, including homosexual people, should lead disciplined lives that fulfill dharma, contribute to the well being of their society and do no harm to anyone." In Balgobind's opinion, sexual orientation falls into the category of *kama* (pleasure), one of the four goals of life, called *purusharthas*.

Other equally qualified religious leaders hold differing views. In an article in the local newspaper *Stabroek News*, Pandit Dhane-sar of the Guyana Central Arya Samaj stated that "according to the *Vedas*, any form of ab-



possibilities. Therefore, the stridency with which the Inter-Religious Organisation has expressed its anti-homosexual sentiments cannot be shared by Hindus." (Read his Op-Ed on page 64.)

### Impacting Personal Lives

The lives of tens of thousands are deeply affected by these discussions. For Guyanese who are gay or lesbian, the reactions of society define their self-image and influence their comfort with who they are. The old, colonial-era laws impose an onerous choice: in order to be a law-abiding citizen in Guyana, a homosexual must observe lifelong celibacy. The alternative is to willfully violate the laws of the land and risk being arrested and charged with a felony.

Religion, ethnicity and social traditions strongly shape the identity of each Guyanese. Religious people who are homosexual wish to retain their religious ties. But even if a homosexual person feels comfortable with his or her faith, the acceptance of society still plays a large role. One of the gay men interviewed recognizes that the Hindu religion advocates tolerance, but he dares not test it in practice. "Many negative stereotypes of gay and lesbian people lead to prejudices," he said. Another gay Hindu man, who also declined to be identified, says, "I have suffered a lot of pain in trying to live an ethical life, while not being able to sustain any personal relationships. I feel out of place in Hindu settings, where I am always under the threat of being rejected; but I also feel out of place in gay settings which do not share my spiritual values."

According to Pandit Tillack, "Many gay and lesbian Hindus enter into heterosexual marriages to please society, sowing distress and future sorrow." This is confirmed by one of the gay men interviewed, who expressed his strong desire to have a family: "My dilemma is wanting children and a family, but how could I fulfill my marriage duties with

**Hindu presence:** The distinctively Indian architecture of Guyanese temples is a common sight

a woman?"

The criminalization of their actions is a heavy burden on homosexuals in Guyana. Many of them have otherwise conservative ideas about family and relationships, aspiring to monogamous long-term commitments and living together. Pushed to the shadows, most seek their happiness in secret, hoping to avoid legal consequences through leniency, anonymity or luck.

### Outcome

There is no consensus yet in the Hindu community, but the strongest voices supporting the anti-discrimination law have come from Hindus. Swamis, pandits and local leaders are finding common ground—not in supporting homosexuality, but in denouncing society's oppression of that minority.

Keeran Persaud is a community leader, president of the Cummings Lodge Industry Hindu Society and a *sevak* of the Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh. Active in helping the gay and lesbian communities, he advocates acceptance: "Hinduism calls on its followers to be compassionate, by educating themselves to overcome prejudices." Amar Ramessar, a member of the Bharata Sevashram Sangha and president of the Yuva Shakti Sangh at the Radha Krishna Mandir, agrees: "I would urge any person to live a dignified life, which leads to a peaceful coexistence with the society. Prejudices are born out of ignorance and fear; our work can help in the education necessary to overcome them."

Pandit Nanda Sahadeo of the Triumph



VIDYARATHA KISSOON

Hindu Mandir, in a letter published in the *Stabroek News* in May, 2008, reminded Hindus that the exhortation of Lord Rama in the *Shri Ramcharitmanas* Uttarkand Doha 87 included the *napumsak* as part of His creation. "*Napumsak*," she explained, "means one who does not have the characteristics of either man or woman—a man trapped in a woman's body or a woman trapped in a man's body." Scriptures can be interpreted on many levels, and the debate will continue.

Swami Aksharananda calls for the use of reason, believing the answer for a peaceful and humane solution will lie with Hindu society more than in religious exegesis. Biologist Ian Kissoon agrees, drawing on science to point out many examples of diversity in sexual orientation in nature, urging us to talk openly and inquisitively.

Whether or not Guyana acts soon to protect the rights of its 30,000 homosexuals, Hindus have a wonderful opportunity to examine different points of view, exert tolerance, and gain strength by forging a union in diversity.

## A Scripture, a Scholar, Science and a Sage: Reviewing Homosexuality in Hinduism

On the fifth day after a woman's period, copulation leads to the birth of a child through the union of the woman's lunar (left) subtle breath and the man's solar (right) subtle breath. If the element earth predominates, a daughter will result; if water dominates, a son will be born; if, however, fire prevails, the pregnancy will end in miscarriage; and if akasha (ether) is dominant, the child will be a homosexual.

**Shiva Svarodaya**, a Hindu scripture on *ida*, *pingala* and the *pranas* of the body

Intersexuals, in whom male and female aspects are combined, are considered holy in India because they invoke the primordial androgyny. They have special functions within society other than the transmission of the genetic code by procreation. Even today, the presence of a *hijra*, the last vestige of the androgynous shaman, is a good omen in a marriage ceremony. The influence of Anglo-Saxon puritanism has meant that the anglicized groups in modern India pretend they do not know of the sacred aspect of the Third Nature and homosexual practices.

**Alain Daniélou**, French Indologist

The **American Psychiatric Association** stated in 1973 that homosexuality is not a disorder and "implies no impairment in judgment, stability, reliability or general social or vocational capabilities." After thoroughly reviewing the scientific data, the **American Psychological Association** adopted the same stance in 1975, and urged all mental health professionals "to take the lead in removing the stigma of mental illness that has long been associated with homosexual orientations." The Supreme Court of the State of California used these opinions in a key case, adding that "Mental health professionals and researchers have long recognized that being homosexual poses no inherent obstacle to leading a happy, healthy and productive life, and that the vast majority of gay and lesbian people function well in the full array of social institutions and interpersonal relationships."

Sexual intercourse is a natural reproductive function. It also serves through its intimacy to express and nurture love. It is love which endows intercourse with its higher qualities, transforming it from an animal function to a human fulfillment. Intensely personal matters of sex are not legislated, but left to the judgment of those involved, subject to community laws and customs. Hinduism neither condones nor condemns birth control, sterilization, masturbation, homosexuality, petting, polygamy or pornography. It does not exclude or draw harsh conclusions against any part of human nature, though scripture prohibits adultery and forbids abortion except to save a mother's life. Advice in such matters should be sought from parents, elders and spiritual leaders. The only rigid rule is wisdom, guided by tradition and virtue.

**Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami**





# Beware of Alien Morals

Fears of damnation and extinction derive not from Hinduism, but from irrational zealotry

BY SWAMI AKSHARANANDA

WHEN GUYANA'S INTER-RELIGIOUS ORGANISATION issued a statement denouncing homosexuality, the central argument was that unseen parties want to influence and corrupt young impressionable minds to promote homosexuality. The statement instructed us that the scriptures of all religions condemn homosexuality, as against the "natural law," violating the natural plan of creation, that will lead to the damnation of our nation and to our extinction.

The most extraordinary claim, however, is that homosexuality is a product of Western culture, a new form of colonialism.

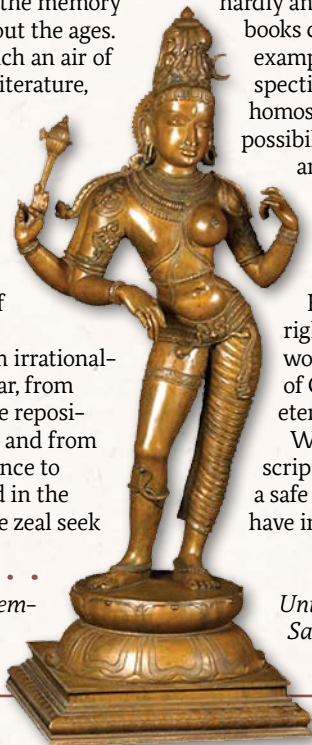
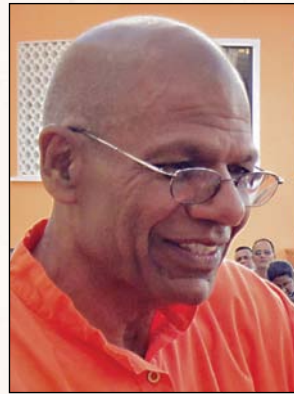
This statement reflects a host of irrational fears that cannot be empirically supported by social reality anywhere in the world. People are not converted to homosexuality in the manner of religious proselytizers who, through unconscionable and despicable methods, unapologetically and deliberately target young and impressionable minds and prey on people's vulnerability.

Of all societies in the world where homosexuality is accepted as an alternative lifestyle, none has suffered the kind of the degradation that our religious leaders fear may take place here in Guyana. The Netherlands, for example, and particularly the Dutch city of Amsterdam, is perhaps one of the most liberal places in the world. The city even boasts a monument devoted to the memory of homosexuals who have been persecuted throughout the ages. There can be few places in the world that breathe such an air of freedom, sophistication and culture, music, art and literature, much of it contributed by homosexuals themselves, as Amsterdam.

From Finland to Italy and across the Atlantic to United States and Canada, liberal, compassionate and enlightened attitudes towards diversity and alternative lifestyles are an integral part of peaceful, progressive, humane societies. In these nations, the family continues to prosper. There are no signs of "extinction" and "damnation."

Such fears derive not from homosexuality, but from irrationality and fanatic religious zealots of every stripe and star, from those religious persuasions which claim to be the sole repository of the truth to which all else must be converted, and from followers of such religions who do not have the patience to wait for unbelievers and homosexuals to be punished in the afterlife, as their teachings go, but who with awesome zeal seek to do so here and now.

**Ardhanarishvara:** Hindu folk traditions believe members of the third sex are auspicious because, akin to the Gods or a soul, they are not bound by gender



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So, who or what poses the greatest dangers to society? Is it homosexuality, or is it religious intolerance? The clear and unambiguous truth is that the greatest danger lies among those aggressive, intolerant religious creeds of the world that see unbelievers and those whom they believe violate the "natural law" as agents of the devil and enemies of God.

We must guard against the self-appointed arbiters of morality, the moral policemen, who claim to derive their authority and inspiration from ancient and divine writs that, implicitly and explicitly, leave no room for toleration of religious differences—or other diversities such as sexual orientation.

This brings us to the claim that having a liberal and enlightened attitude towards homosexuality means that we are giving in to Western influence and values. It is always intriguing when we hear uninformed people speak of homosexuality as a form of colonialism. Aren't they aware of the apparent contradictions? Of all the institutions we have inherited from the colonial past, there is none more thoroughly colonial and Western, heart and soul, than Christianity—a religion whose scriptures are often invoked when vilifying homosexuals.

The fact of the matter is that homosexuality is as old as humanity itself. It has been practiced for untold centuries, in one form or another, even in those societies where, today, death can be the penalty for homosexuals.

We must also be concerned about what is glibly and uncritically invoked to be the position of scriptures on homosexuality. There is hardly any consensus here. While it is true that some religious books consider homosexuality an abomination, Hinduism, for example, offers a much more nuanced and sophisticated perspective on the matter. While Hinduism does not approve of homosexuality, it admits of a wide range of sexual orientation possibilities; therefore, the vehemence and stridency of loud anti-homosexual sentiments cannot be shared by Hindus.

Rationality is all I am advocating. Religious people often decide which things are right and wrong based on what they believe and imagine to be true, which in turn is based on what is stated in their religious texts. How does one know whether a religious scripture is right? The answer is that it is the inviolable, unalterable word of God. And, how does one know that it is the word of God? The only answer is because God says so. Quite an eternal conundrum!

When held beyond the scrutiny of reason, no religious scripture, no matter how sacred we hold it to be, can ever be a safe ground on which to decide important issues that may have implications in matters of life and death.

*Swami Aksharananda, Ph.D. in Hindu Studies at the University of Wisconsin–Madison (USA), is principal of the Saraswati Vidya Niketan. He is also a founder of Guyana's Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh chapter.*



THOMAS KELLY

## So Say Our Sadhus

Opinions are far from unanimous

FOR MILLENIA, THE KUMBHA MELAS HAVE BEEN THE SUMMIT gathering of Hindu leaders. A sampling of opinions from the Mela sadhus carries great authority. Here is what they had to say in 2004, in Ujjain, about homosexuality and gay marriage. In India, questions about homosexuality are often met with answers about gay marriage, as if one was the inexorable consequence of the other. This was a hushed subject at the time, before the Supreme Court of India decriminalized gay sex in 2009 and hurled the topic onto the public stage.

**Swami Pragyana Maharaj, Mahamandaleshwar of the Awahan Akhara:** Gay marriages do not fit in our culture and heritage. All those who demand the approval of such marriages in India are doing so under the influence of the West. Incorrect Western practices have no place in our culture; we should not blindly follow. Sanatana Dharma has no place for this and we do not even discuss it.

**Shri Mahant Madhusudan Giri, Awahan Akhara:** This issue is connected not just to Hinduism, but to the whole human civilization. Today, people are changing their religions and nationalities; they are even changing their sex. We have to allow people to live their lives in their own way. If they choose to live in a particular way, out of the consent of two grown-up people, how can we stop them? Religion has no role in this.

**Mahant Baba Ram Puri, Juna Akhara:** These questions are contemporary in nature and context. To somehow project that to the Vedas, Rama Kathas or the Mahabharata and look for answers there is not appropriate. The rule books back then described a society with different goals, ideas, costumes, diets and everything else. We do not have a final rule book in Hinduism. Even the *Manu Smriti* says that local traditions can overrule its guidelines. There has never been a single authority to represent all Hindus and guide them on morality. Ours is a pluralistic society, and the community has to exercise its wisdom.

**Maharishi Sarkhandi Mahatyagi, from Gujarat:** This is just *adharmic*. If these relations were to be accepted, then why was creation created? When Brahma directed Manu to create the world, Manu clearly said that the creation could not be made without women. Hindu dharma cannot sanction man-to-man marriages.

**Pandit Shailendra Shri Sheshnarayan Ji Vaidyaka, Digambar Sadhu of the Simhashta Samiti:** Whatever is done in hiding becomes a wrong act and is treated as a sin. But whatever is done openly invites criticism for some time but ultimately may gain acceptance. People who are bent upon doing something would do it anyway. Why not give them the liberty to live in their own way? Our scriptures have no reference to homosexuality; therefore, we have nothing to say.

**Nirvanpeethadheeshwar Shri 108 Devananda, Mahamandaleshwar of the Mahanirvani Akhara:** Gay marriages definitely would pollute our society. Such perverted activities used to be carried out by a few. To give legitimacy and social acceptance to it would be a big injustice to our social life. This is an activity which people do not do openly, therefore it is a social crime. It should stay secret. Scriptures may or may not give a guideline, but if we see this in the context of society, we find it to be absolutely wrong. It portrays a very dark side of our society.

**Acharya Mahamandaleshwar Swami Avdheshananda, Juna Peethadheeshwar:** Homosexuality is unnatural, uncommon and unusual. It is not marriage, because it is just connected to the body, it is only fun. This is sheer madness that comes from the West where they use the Bible. Our scriptures, which are superior, are against it.

**Shri 1008 Kapalik Mahakaal Bhairavananda Saraswati, from New Delhi:** Certainly this is going to give people bad diseases which will be a great problem to gay-friendly USA in the times to come. US Government should also take action against such people immediately. India does not have such issues. The day a demand for gay unions is raised in India will be a black day for the country.

**Mahamandaleshwar Swami Banwari Puri, Juna Akhara:** Our tradition does not approve of gay marriages. But our scriptures do not outline a clear direction. The *Bhagwat* has a story, which I have read nowhere else, in which King Bhagirath was born out of physical union of both his mothers. Same-sex marriage is against the laws of God. Now, whether such marriages can keep such couples happy and peaceful should be answered only by gays—not by us, who have no idea what it is all about.

### A CORRESPONDENT'S ADVENTURE by Rajiv Malik

IT WAS 2004, AND I HAD BEEN ASSIGNED to ask the Mela's constellation of saints: "How does Hinduism view homosexuality? What about gay marriage?" In retrospect, I realize that HINDUISM TODAY was ahead of its time. This became a hotly debated topic in India a few years later.

Raising the subjects of homosexuality and gay marriage was not easy. Hindu holy men hardly enjoyed discussing these

contentious subjects amongst the crowds. Some sadhus briskly asked me to switch off the tape recorder. They inquired the reasons behind my inquiry; did I have any agenda?

But the revered spiritual leaders slowly opened up, at times hesitantly, and eventually spoke with candor. Once they became convinced that our idea was to inform and educate Hindus, they gave their consent to go ahead and ask these difficult questions.





PHOTO JOURNALISM

# The Sadhus of India & Nepal

**S**ADHUS ARE AN ENIGMA TO ME, LIVING THE mystery of ancient questions that have no answers. Mystics, yogis, wanderers, even tricksters, derelicts, madmen and charlatans, their boldly painted bodies confront us with essential questions at the heart of existence. I found them wandering through crowded, polluted urban centers begging, in the villages and on what is left of forest and mountain pilgrimage trails. Like walking mysteries of the human soul, for me, sadhus provoke the questions: "Who am I? What do I need? what really is important? And the more ancient pre-settled desire to wander in search of God." Most importantly, they remind us that the answer for all things only lies within our own elusive hearts.

In my adopted home of Kathmandu, some sadhus survive primarily off alms made from allowing tourists to photograph them. They are a spectacle and love to play their assigned role in the illusion or drama of society. Their masks are thickly painted on their naked bodies.

Sadhus have formally abandoned conventional time; and their world is dense with its own complex politics, social hierarchy, taboos and customs, often making access challenging. Volatile and unpredictable, spontaneous photography of sadhus can actually be dangerous. You can easily be trampled or attacked if you immerse yourself in a naga baba procession after a mass Kumbha Mela bathing. There's no such thing as achieving photographic acceptance within the sadhu *mandala*. For me, photographing at ritual time is always the most dynamic and fluid. Once rapport has been established, a camera is tolerated, often with a sense of lila, or maya, play and illusion. It took repeated visits over many seasons and melas, to occasionally reach this level.

As a photographer, I loved how they allow their bodies to become symbols of the sacred—from walking around naked to remind us of our naked selves, to wearing ash to remind us what are bodies become, to dreadlocks to remind us of our natural wild natures devoid of social convention. Their bodies are texts that speak volumes regarding sacred symbolism.

A sadhu's body is a map of the Hindu universe, for the body is a microcosm of the cosmos. Like a canvas, the color and painted symbols aid in purification, inspire, and remind of the timeless divine beyond body and form. As the sadhu works towards an egoless state, he becomes the very symbols he has painted, whether it be Siva, Vishnu or Rama, and the colors refer to esoteric inner visions and possible alchemical states of consciousness. The real goal of a sadhu is to achieve an attitude of non-attachment and transcendence of the physical body.

As a photographer, I sometimes like to hide behind my lens, be-



THOMAS KELLY

**Sacred body painting:** A sadhu meticulously paints the mark, or tilaka, of his sect on his forehead and body. Marks vary from sect to sect. His is a Vaishnava tilaka. It is made from clay or ground sandalwood. The U-shaped white line between the eyes is symbolic of the red-white sole of the right foot of Lord Vishnu resting on a lotus. It is worn by the Badgals and Acharis. The Tengal sectarians draw a trident. The two prongs are painted with white earth. The white line drawn over the nose represents a lotus. The red dot represents Lakshmi, consort of Vishnu.

come invisible. Yet for sadhus, it is their very outlandish visibility, the powerful symbols of the divine they paint on their bodies, which helps them not to become invisible, but to transcend self. Photographing these disturbing, annoying, inspiring, exasperating, irrational, wise and powerful beings is like photographing a living question that people have forgotten to ask.

PHOTO AND TEXT BY THOMAS KELLY, FROM "BODY LANGUAGE—THE YOGIS OF INDIA & NEPAL" WHICH IS SHOWING AT THE RUBIN MUSEUM IN NEW YORK THROUGH MAY 2011



PHILOSOPHY

# East Meets West

Hinduism is transforming Western consciousness, and our ancient religion is evolving in response

BY SWAMI SHANKARANANDA

**H**INDUISM, IN THE COURSE OF ITS LONG HISTORY, has always adjusted itself to changing circumstances. Today we live the evolutionary encounter of Hinduism and Western culture. Scholar Georg Feuerstein wrote, echoing Carl Jung and Arnold Toynbee: "The westward movement of Eastern teachings is a most decisive event in our time, one which has already transformed the West."

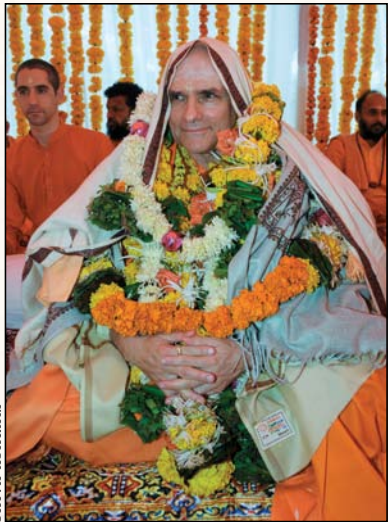
With regard to this westward flow of Hinduism, the key landmark is surely Swami Vivekananda's famous talk at the first Parliament of the World's Religions in Chicago in 1893. Eastern influences were already making an impact by then: the Theosophical Society had been founded in 1875, and German and American transcendentalists had been reading the *Upanishads* and the *Bhagavad Gita* for nearly a century. However, Vivekananda's talk opened the floodgates of visits by Hindu gurus to the West, a movement which reached a peak around 1970 when major teachers began their ministry.

Sanatana Dharma holds that behind every religion there is an unseen essence: the Self, or Brahman. The highest understanding of Sanatana Dharma is that it implies non-dual awareness, as in "*Aham Brahmasmi*"—"I am Brahman." We know that as long as a person is alive the Self exists within them, even if they lose their way and wander in misery and ignorance. In the same way, the essence of every religion is always present, even when that religion goes through a less enlightened period. That very Self of religion is nothing but the Sanatana Dharma.

However, when most Western seekers look at the broad expanse of Hinduism, they find themselves absorbing it gradually. The West is generally interested in yoga, asanas, *kirtan*, meditation, gurus, non-dual philosophy and the concepts of karma, reincarnation and dharma. Therefore, Western Hinduism is interested in the aspects of Hinduism that are spiritual, yet logical for the intellectual mind.

In my own spiritual path a critical moment occurred when I discovered that great beings who realized Truth still exist in our time. Soon after I was off to India, where I met my guru, Baba Muktananda. Because of these great living souls, Hinduism has spread beyond India's borders and traveled around the world. There was not a merely philosophical or intellectual influence. The great pioneering Indian masters actually gave an awakening to students. They gave *shaktipat* (mystical initiation), awakening the kundalini energy. As a result, there are thousands, maybe even millions, of Westerners who have been awakened, accepted a guru and are now doing sadhana, meditating, attending satsangs and reading Hindu scripture. Such is the influence of great Indian gurus.

In 1893, when Swami Vivekananda gave his talk, yoga and meditation were unknown in the West. Today, 118 years later, they are everywhere. There are yoga studios in every shopping center. Every



SHIVA ASHRAM

other celebrity is meditating and lots of ordinary people are, too. *Kirtan* is spreading like wildfire. And now a remarkable percentage of Americans and Australians accept the notions of karma and reincarnation. In short, Hindu philosophy and practices are widespread in the West.

I believe Hinduism is the unacknowledged inspiration behind much of contemporary spirituality. Words like guru, aum, mantra, shanti, samadhi, yoga, karma, pandit, chakra, prana and shakti have become English words. There are sports gurus, business gurus, and even golf mantras. Not only have all these ideas penetrated the West, but, more importantly, people are actually doing sadhana. Practice, or sadhana, is the difference between belonging to a religion and being firmly on a path.

I observe the extraordinary fact that, for the first time in history, we have legitimate Western Hindu gurus from authentic lineages. This suggests that something new is emerging. When a religion meets a new culture, an alchemy happens. Because Western seekers have grown up in a different culture, they take a different eye to the Hindu traditions, valuing and adopting the elements of the Hindu dharma that speak to them. From the point of view of orthodoxy, this is a tragedy. But from the point of view of the Sanatana Dharma, it is an evolutionary necessity.

No one knows where the integration of East and West will lead, but it is a fascinating process. One thing is certain: the growth of Western Hinduism will continue. Overall, a new, worldwide Hinduism is emerging, but the inner core of the Sanatana Dharma can never change. It will continue to bring light to the world.

Hinduism has great freedom and flexibility. When a disciple reaches spiritual maturity, he attains a deep relationship with the Divine, becoming a sage who may blend traditional and innovative methods. Hinduism does not stifle independence. The *Shiva Sutras* say, "*Siddha svatantra bhava*," "A siddha is supremely free."

The genius of Hinduism is that it forever expresses the dynamism of Divine revelation. It does not get bogged down in dogma and limitation. Forms are created, sustained and destroyed; new forms arise, blazing with the shakti of revelation.

I urge all Hindus to accept this new international form of the same ancient Hinduism, with its many seekers from foreign lands. Hindus have every reason to be proud that the great teachings of the Hindu sages have spread around the world. This is not a distortion of Vedic culture but a tribute to the greatness and universality of these teachings. India is the spiritual mother of the world.

I belong to an ancient lineage of great masters. I revere my own tradition while respecting others. Hinduism is free enough to meet each new situation with courage and creativity. This new wave is an expression of the same force that manifested as the *Vedas* numberless years ago. It is the widest, broadest and most tolerant path. As such, it will not go wrong.





## BOOK REVIEWS

# Youth Course Released

THE BALA VIHAR TEACHER'S HANDBOOKS were developed at the request of Chinmaya Mission head Swami Tejomayananda by Gaurang and Darshana Nanavaty, Acharya teachers of Chinmaya Mission Houston. These are manuals intended for the teachers, not to give to the children. Within the Mission, their use is supplemented with intensive teacher training courses. However, a parent could, with effort, put the books to good use. Each is a set of 40 lessons. Presently in print are kindergarten, grades 1, 2, 3, 4 (in two volumes), 7 and 8. The course is planned through grade 12. The books convey the Chinmaya Mission's Vedanta philosophy within the Smarta tradition of Hinduism.

A teacher's handbook is a bit like an computer repair manual. For a technician, it is easy to follow; but to the inexperienced amateur, possibly an insurmountable challenge. The books are written for the teacher experienced with following lesson plans, setting up class projects, leading chants and bhajans, storytelling and all the other skills and tasks necessary for a productive hour with Hindu children. An index would have been a welcome addition to navigate the complex compilation of material.

Grade 1 is called *Bala Ramayana* and takes the students through the entire story of Lord Rama. There is throughout the course a strong emphasis on Sanskrit. Each of the 40 lessons opens with the Sanskrit prayer, *saha navavatu....*, and then ten minutes of memorization of another sloka. The handbook next summarizes one part of the *Ramayana*, for example, the capture of Sita by Ravana. The teacher doesn't read this directly to the class, but is expected to render the story in his or her own dramatic fashion. There is a coloring page to fill in for each class, and a game that is related to the story. The games are a unique feature of the course. They are, according to the Nanavatys, the result of years of development, and quite clever in conveying a religious principle or spiritual concept.

Grade 8 is called *Yato Dharmah Tato Jayah*, "Where there is dharma, there is victory," a famous statement of Bhishma in the *Mahabharata*. Several chapters cover the yamas and niyamas, the traditional Hindu restraints and observances such as purity, truthfulness, nonstealing, forgiveness, etc.

Many chapters are based on a famous section of the epic, the Yaksha Prasna in which a yaksha, a celestial being, poses a series of



difficult questions to Yudhisthira, eldest of the Pandavas. In Lesson 21, for example, the yaksha asks, "O king, you please decide and tell me how does one become a brahmin—by heritage, conduct, study or by listening to the scriptures?" Yudhisthira responds, "Not by heritage, not by study nor by listening to the scriptures one becomes a brahmin. Only through conduct one becomes a brahmin. I have no doubt about it." Other chapters discuss excerpts from the *Bhagavad Gita*, referencing Swami Chinmayananda's commentary.

In addition to summarizing the story of the *Mahabharata* in Grade 8, many other traditional Hindu tales are used to illustrate a point. There are also charming quotations from Swami Chinmayanada, for example: "People say, 'God has forsaken me!' Is there an ornament forsaken by gold? Can a mud pot be forsaken by mud? In every experience of yours He is ever with you. How far is water from the waves? How far is the waker from the dreamer? So far is God from you!"

At \$75 each, the books are expensive, but this is a typical price for a teacher's guide. The books are a priceless resource, the result of decades of work and experience by the Nanavatys. The couple were early graduates of the Chinmaya Mission's two-and-a-half-year Vedanta Course, both of them setting aside their careers to participate. Since then, they have been based in Houston where they are key movers behind the Chinmaya Mission's successful Bala Vihar program at centers across the United States. Some exercise books for the students are available now, with a complete set being prepared.

BALA VIHAR TEACHER'S HANDBOOK, ISBN 978-1-880687-41-3 (KINDERGARTEN), CHINMAYA PUBLICATIONS, 560 BRIDGETOWN PIKE, LANGHORNE, PA, 19503 USA, 9 VOLUMES, \$75.00 EACH; WWW.CHINMAYAPUBLICATION.COM

## Deftly Introducing Our Hindu Religion

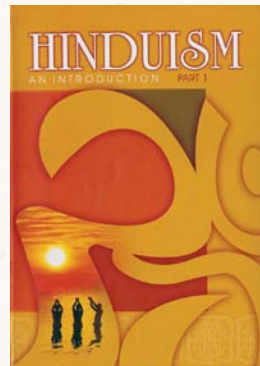
THIS NEWEST PUBLICATION FROM THE BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha, led by Sri Pramukh Swami Maharaj, is a marvelous summary of the entire spectrum of the Hindu tradition in all of its grand diversity. *Hinduism, An Introduction*, by Sadhu Vivekjiandas, in two full-color volumes is a worthy addition to any Hindu's library.

So often in books on general Hinduism one philosophy is given as if it and it alone is what all Hindus believe. One Deity is mentioned as if all Hindus only worship Him or Her. *Hinduism, an Introduction* takes a different view: "Hinduism is a grand mosaic of many *sampradayas* [traditional teaching lineages], philosophies, rituals, festivals, *mandirs* [temples], holy places, sadhus and shastras, and is often referred to by many scholars as a family of 'religions.' Within these rich diversities, one can perceive common threads that bind Hinduism into a fascinatingly profound religion subscribed to by nearly one-sixth of humankind."

Notably, the set shows the reader many facets of modern Hindu temple worship—again a topic commonly ignored in introductions to Hinduism. The scriptures upon which the ceremonies and architecture are based, the *Agamas*, are well detailed. The centrality of rituals in Hindu life is succinctly stated: "Rituals form an integral part of worship and have been practised from generation to generation in countless homes and *mandirs*. They are deeply embedded in the Hindu culture. Hindus believe that the Deity is present in the sacred *murti* [temple image]."

Though presenting the multiplicity of Deities in Hinduism, the book stresses that Hindus all worship a one Supreme Being. Chapter Two begins: "The traditional defining principles of most Hindus are the belief and faith in one Supreme Divine Reality or Paramatma... (who) manifests in various forms. The belief in one Supreme God is called Ekeshwaravada." This is a helpful counter to what is unfortunately still encountered in many introductions to Hinduism which is that Hindus believe in a trinity of Gods: Brahma, Vishnu and Siva.

HINDUISM, AN INTRODUCTION, BY SADHU VIVEKJIANDAS; VOL. 1, ISBN 978-81-7526-433-5, 368 PAGES; VOL. 2, ISBN 978-81-7526-434-2, 314 PAGES; SWAMINARAYAN AKSHARPITH, AMDAVALD 4, INDIA; WWW.SWAMINARAYAN.ORG/PUBLICATIONS/ (US\$20.00/SET)



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# Hindu Heritage Endowment

## MONKS INVITE SUPPORTERS TO SECURE HINDUISM TODAY’S FUTURE

Yogi Jothinatha, one of Kauai’s Hindu Monastery’s 20 monks, swings from exuberance about Hinduism Today’s future to dogged determination to make it a bright one.

He is convinced that the Hinduism Today Production Fund endowment is a key to that future. “It is amazing how well the magazine is doing considering we’re operating on a shoestring budget,” he explains. “But we’d like to move on. The world is hungry to hear more of Hinduism’s wise and healing ways, and there’s a lot more to be told—and a lot more souls to reach. Our editors are chafing at the bit to be free of rigorous budget constraints and expand in every direction — as soon as possible.”

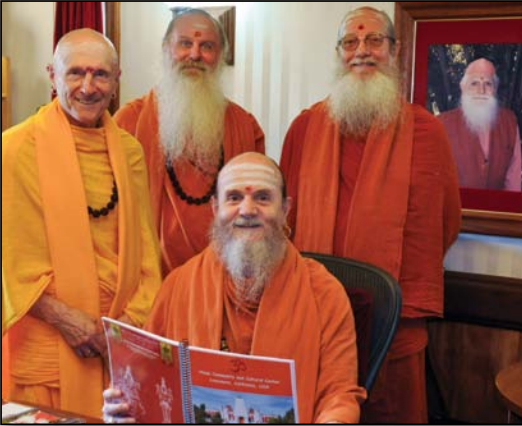
“A stronger Production Fund will allow editors to hire top researchers, designers, writers, professional consultants—in print and digital realms—and to send teams of reporters anywhere in the world at any time to gather great stories. We can do a hundred times better,” Yogi insists, adding that hiring translators, is another opportunity for dramatic expansion that editors want to tap as soon as the Production Fund allows.

The fund already supports special articles, staff training in digital technology and video production. Yogi fairly glows when he talks about the explosion in outreach brought about by digital technology. “All of our issues are now up on Scribd, for example. And, in just a few months, the we have garnered nearly 200,000 views, there. Our 100 videos on YouTube tell a similar story. And the best part,” he explains, “is that most of those viewers are youth, always our favorite audience. Here again we are counting on the growth of the Production Fund to allow Hinduism Today to seize every one of the future’s new, golden opportunities.”

He says that a strong fund will also protect the magazine from financial ups and down, so it never faces dire straights as did failed Newsweek, or The New York Times who recently announced plans to eventually abandon their printed edition. “We prefer to model ourselves on the National Geographic Magazine, which has thrived for 113 years and grows more spectacular with each issue, thanks to their endowment. That is what we want for Hinduism Today.”

Yogi Jothinatha hopes more people will support the magazine. “Hinduism Today is a team effort,” he offers. “There is no limit to what we can do together. Three years ago, we launched a campaign to increase the Production Fund’s principal by \$100,000, which would give editors an extra \$1,000 a quarter to work with. “It’s a modest amount but it would make a big difference. And it’ll be a first strong step in the right direction.”

The campaign started just as the economy melted down and contributions have come in rather haltingly so far, Yogi pointed out. He encourages those who feel currently strapped to consider including the Production Fund in their estate plans. “Hinduism Today is there for the long haul, and your help in the future will be powerful.” Donating \$1,000 or more outright or in an estate plan makes one an honored benefactor of Hinduism Today. Anyone wanting to learn more about the Production Fund, or wanting to help is encouraged to contact Yogi at 1-808-634-5407 or at [jothi@hindu.org](mailto:jothi@hindu.org). Donations may be made online at [www.hheonline.org/donate-production-fund](http://www.hheonline.org/donate-production-fund). And one can become a benefactor at [www.hheonline.org/become-benefactor](http://www.hheonline.org/become-benefactor).



Strategizing Hinduism Today’s future: Paramacharya Palaniswami, editor-in-chief (center), Sannyasin Shanmuganathaswami, charitable funds manager of HHE (right) and Yogi Jothinatha confer with publisher and satguru Bodhinatha

OCTOBER TO DECEMBER ENDOWMENT CONTRIBUTIONS						
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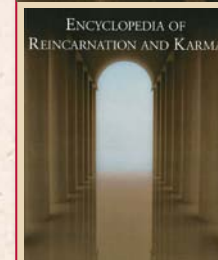
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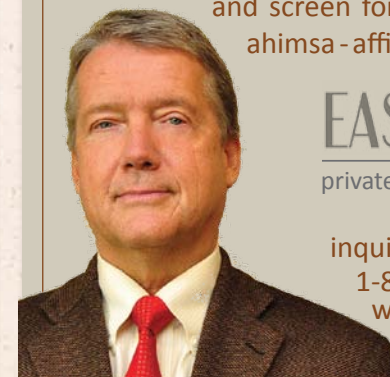
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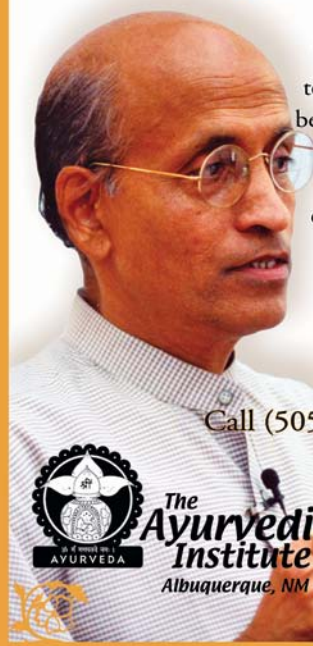


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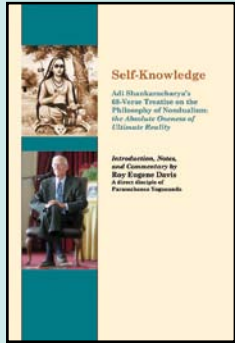
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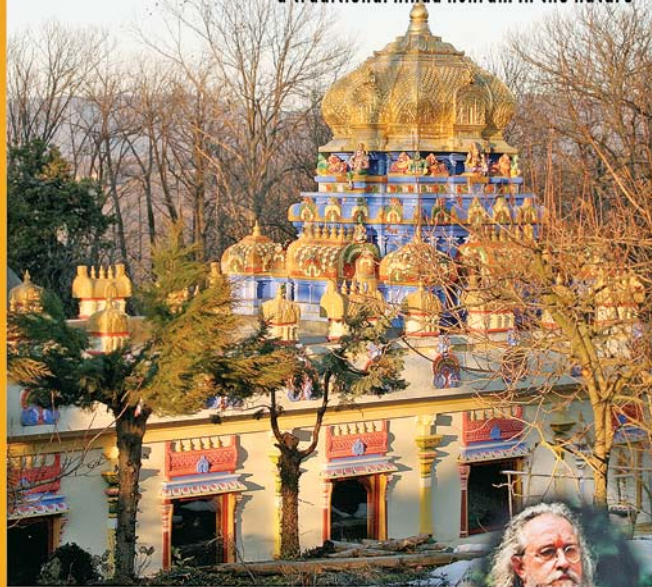


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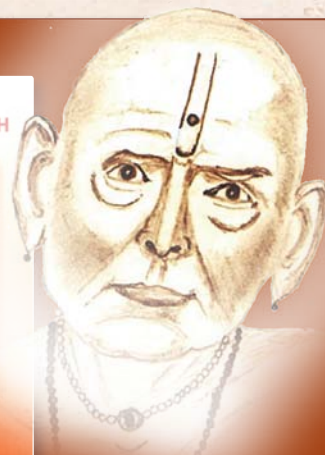
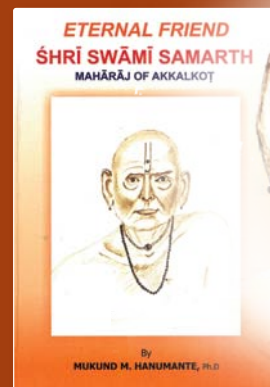
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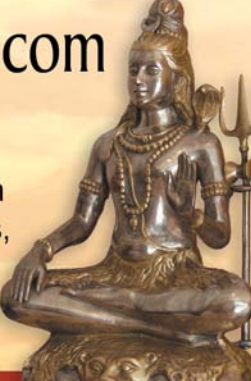
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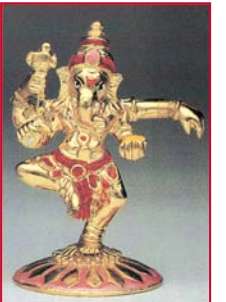
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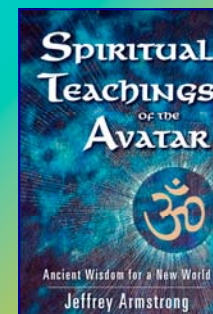
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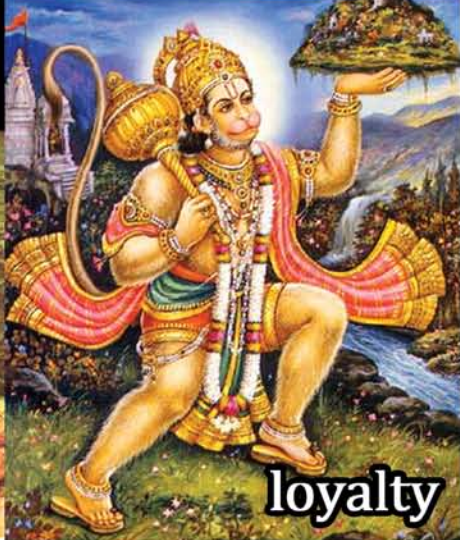
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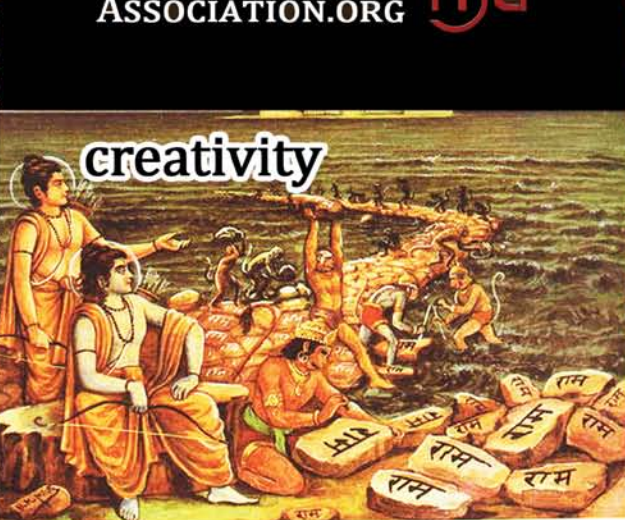
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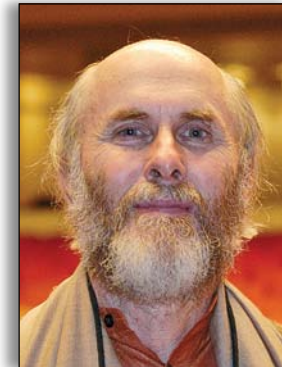
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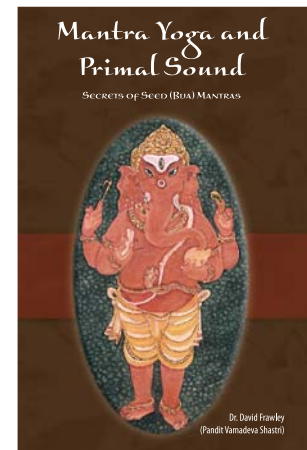
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## The laws of Light

### Part 1

1. There is a lingering pain.  
It comes oft and then again.  
Is my hour done?  
Has my moment come?  
Or is it a sadness setting of moments  
That are fleeting?  
But I see the souls from the mist;  
My name is on their list.
2. Come, walk with me on the sands of time  
And let me hold your hands in mine.  
We do not know  
If together shall brave, once more,  
The Tapavan snow.  
  
I must keep the hour and cannot be late,  
To meet my friends at the gate.  
In what lives shall we meet?  
Or in what dreams each other greet?  
We are not in the know.
3. Draw me to Thee, close.  
Thee, thee alone I chose.  
And let me look into Thine Eyes Divine  
That speak of words sublime:  
A kind heart here  
Blossoms into a wondrous spirit there.  
A helping hand knows no gate;  
A heavy man drowns himself into a different fate

4. That smile on Thy Lips  
That lights up Thine Eyes  
As if about to speak.  
A woman's beauty is in her speech,  
Not in the bikini on the beach.  
Speak with words that are measured,  
Or not: silence is to be treasured.

5. And Thy hands that pointed The Way  
In the darkness of my day:  
You, who have  
But know not you have: Awake!  
You, who know  
But know not you know: Awake!  
You, who search  
For that you are: Awake!

6. Roses cut in the morning dew  
Did I send Thee  
In colours of deep red hue.  
Thy steps are lighted.  
And Thou art in Thy Golden Glory.  
Thy Shimmering Sceptre  
Blazes the Light of Truth  
In the darkness of the Night  
That has decended upon the Earth.

7. Climb the 272 steps.  
It is not a race  
Towards any place.  
Reach to your self,  
And transcend time and space.

Walk up the steps,  
Moment by moment—

In the moment—  
The brilliance of the Central Sun  
Unfolds the radiance of your soul.

Scale the daunting height,  
Breath by breath,  
Into a child's delight.

8. Map the tributaries of your envy,  
Feeding the sea of your anger.  
Stop! Danger.

9. My self on self shall judge  
If I bore on you and you a grudge.  
Did I with the poor share?  
Or did I for my self care?  
A selfless soul  
Ascends.

A Heart more in weight  
Than a feather Decends.

10. There are no weeping willows in my garden;  
Only trees with clusters  
Upon clusters  
Of yellow flowers laden.  
The weeds are a daily nuisance,  
Patch by patch I work to maintain my essence.

11. Many will return to harvest their fields.  
But the hermit on the mountain side  
In silence does he reside.  
No grain, no fruit his stillness yields.

12. His body is the mud of the lotus pond.  
Same with her eyes, he is so fond.  
The purple orchids dazzling in the sun,  
Nurtured with loving hands  
Face the same double barrel gun.

13. Seek, then, freedom from freedom.  
No rule is written in stone in His Kingdom.  
My spirit is not in a bind.  
By scriptures I left behind.

14. I am no member of any sect;  
No book is my text.

I live in the vibration of the Beauteous One,  
The One from The One.

15. I roam the wilderness of my mind:  
Carefree and careful.  
Untamed but challenged.

A speck of glow in search of the Globe of Light.

16. The cosmos wears many a mask.  
Layer on layer.  
Dimension within dimension.  
Unveiling Her is a Herculian task.

17. I leave creation to creation;  
Existence to existence.  
Too many whys end up in naught.  
She will release information  
In time for my food for thought.

### Part 2

1. My body is the key  
To the door of life,  
The other side.
2. The souls from the mist  
Have crossed my name from their list.  
I have gone to the world beyond.  
Menaka, in tatters is our mutual bond.  
We lied together;  
We lied to each other.  
Hands can no longer touch;  
Words can no longer reach.  
No emails, no faxes, no cell,  
The delusion begins to tell.  
The firmament played no trick  
We must our own wounds in silence lick:  
I who was not yours  
And you who were not mine,  
Drinking from the same glass,  
The Wine of eternity...

3. By thought a villa I built  
On the mountain side,  
With my Lord of Light beside.  
18 pillars of Greek design  
Stand sentinels, each to each, in align.  
I dressed her in chandeliers of pale purple.  
I created her secret chamber  
In petals of Lotuses;  
And made the sound of Aum her companion,  
As she looks beyond the valley  
Towards the hills in the distance.

4. I live here as I lived there.  
All alone.

5. My eyes are poignant  
Like a lamenting love poem.  
Waiting and waiting  
In the silence of the Night  
For my General of Light.

6. My child dreaming of the mystical  
Go to your secret chamber  
And enter the door of stillness,  
The silence of your being.  
And hear me speak.

7. If you did not know HIM there,  
You will not know HIM here.  
Deeper into your being dive  
And dive deeper and deeper.

He is not this way.  
Or that way.  
He is the Way.

Where you stand is the road to GOD.  
Silence is His language.  
Where you meet HIM is in the Now.  
He is the Light.  
The Central Sun—the Energy.  
He is Matter.  
The only matter that matters.  
He is Siva,  
The Consciousness Supreme.  
The Absolute.

If you have not seen Him there.  
You will not see Him here.  
He is heard but not seen.  
Cannot be touched but felt,  
By the innocence of your being.

He is the Mind that conceived you.  
The Eye that watches over you.  
The Heart that loves you.  
He is the eternity,  
Not to be understood;  
But to stand in awe  
In wonder of His  
Galaxies upon galaxies, ad infinitum.  
My child, stay in that awe  
In that wonder.

Till I open for you another door of death  
To Life on another plane of consciousness...  
The Laws of Light, In remembrance of  
The Creator, Lord Shiva.



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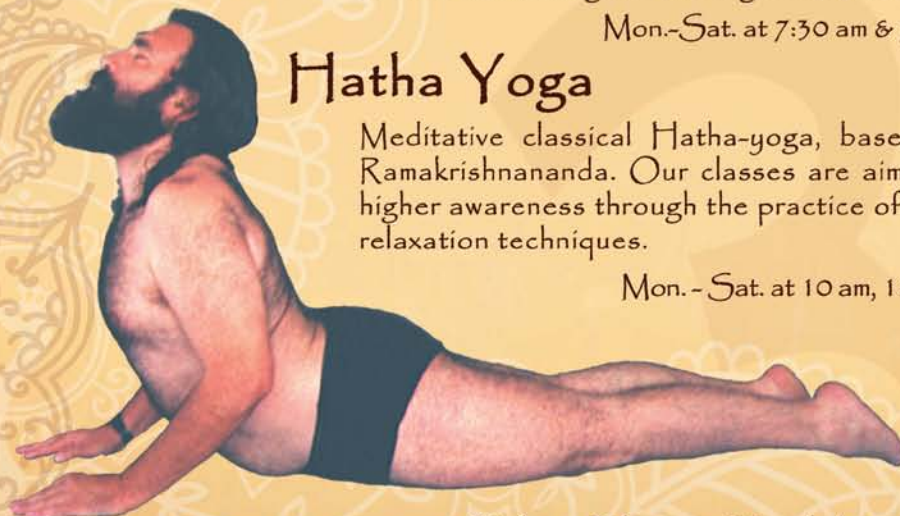
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## Sanskrit—Alive and Well with a Wealth of Tools on the Internet

BY MADHURI SHEKHAR, LOS ANGELES

FOR SOMETHING THAT IS OFTEN UNCHARitably termed a dead language, Sanskrit is remarkably alive and vibrant on the internet. Any enthusiast looking to deepen his knowledge of the language, or a beginner seeking to explore and get a grasp of its basics, can avail from dozens of comprehensive learning resources online and even learn through mobile apps.

The best interactive resource for beginners (perhaps even the oldest) is possibly the Sanskrit lessons provided online by Acharya, an institute that is part of IIT-Madras in Chennai, India. These lessons form an easy, step-by-step guide to grasping the basics of conversational Sanskrit. ([www.bit.ly/acharya-lessons](http://www.bit.ly/acharya-lessons)) The lessons include audio and Flash content, and interactive quizzes to test your knowledge.

Sanskrita Bharathi, an organization known in India for its intensive spoken Sanskrit courses and camps, has archived several of their learning documents online and also allows the serious student to sign up for their distance-education program. ([www.sanskritabharati.org](http://www.sanskritabharati.org))

For those who prefer audio learning to text, the University of Michigan's Center for South Asian studies has a comprehensive list of audio files from the book "Sanskrita-Subodhini: a Sanskrit primer"—perfect to listen to in the car. ([www.bit.ly/umich-edu-sanskrit](http://www.bit.ly/umich-edu-sanskrit))

If video is more your speed, the YouTube channel by user apbshah ([www.youtube.com/user/apbshah](http://www.youtube.com/user/apbshah)) has a fantastic series of spoken Sanskrit videos aimed at increasing your conversational ability.

Since learning an Indian language is often easier done through another Indian language, Tamil speakers can avail of the Tamil-to-Sanskrit resources at [www.sangatham.com](http://www.sangatham.com).

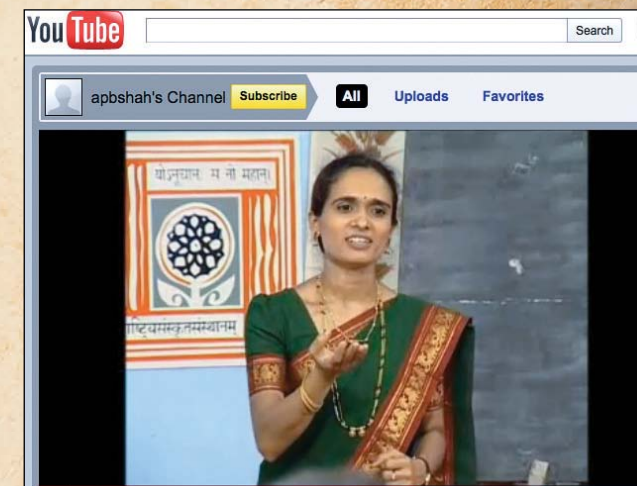
While Sanskrit apps have yet to make a significant mark, the iOS and Android app "Sanskrit Primer" is a boon for Sanskrit students. Containing easy reference guides

to grammar and terminology, with accompanying audio pronunciation files, this app is a must-have for anyone looking for a convenient pocket reference guide. (See [www.sparshapps.com](http://www.sparshapps.com))

There are quite a few active blogs in Sanskrit as well, to add to your daily surfing ritual. We recommend: [www.practicalsanskrit.blogspot.com](http://www.practicalsanskrit.blogspot.com); [www.learn Sanskrit.wordpress.com](http://www.learn Sanskrit.wordpress.com); [www.sanskrtam.wordpress.com](http://www.sanskrtam.wordpress.com); [www.slabhyankar.wordpress.com](http://www.slabhyankar.wordpress.com) and [www.venetiaansell.wordpress.com](http://www.venetiaansell.wordpress.com).

During your study, one wonderful daily resource to help you practice and learn would be the daily news broadcasts in Sanskrit done by All India Radio, available online at their site: [www.newsonair.com/nsd\\_schedule.asp](http://www.newsonair.com/nsd_schedule.asp)

For those not inclined to dive right in to the study of the language, this PDF lets you



Top to Bottom: YouTube user apbshah's Sanskrit Classes (requires knowledge to follow); Sanskrita Bharati is great for English speaking beginners; "Sanskrit Primer" is an effective mobile app (iOS and Android).

share in the joy of Sanskrit's incredible dexterity and the unbelievable sophistication of Sanskrit poetry, possibly unmatched by any other language in the world. See [www.bit.ly/roc-sanskrit](http://www.bit.ly/roc-sanskrit) and download this file: [14339015-The-wonder-that-is-Sanskrit.pdf](http://14339015-The-wonder-that-is-Sanskrit.pdf)

We've only touched upon the surface of the various Sanskrit resources available online. If you are interested in further exploration, these websites have comprehensive lists of the wealth of information and resources available online: [www.sanskritdocuments.org/learning\\_tools/](http://www.sanskritdocuments.org/learning_tools/); [www.bit.ly/hm-pota](http://www.bit.ly/hm-pota); [www.bit.ly/sanskrit-inria](http://www.bit.ly/sanskrit-inria).

Good luck in your efforts, or rather,

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Sanskrit Primer	
1. Introduction	>
2. The Alphabet (Varnamaala)	>
3. Grammar Basics	>
4. Verbs (Kriya/Tinanta)	>
5. Prepositions (Upasarga)	>
6. Nouns (Naama/Subanta)	>
7. Adjectives (Viseshana/Subanta)	>
8. Pronouns (Sarvanaama/Subanta)	>